Devaratham

an introduction

By

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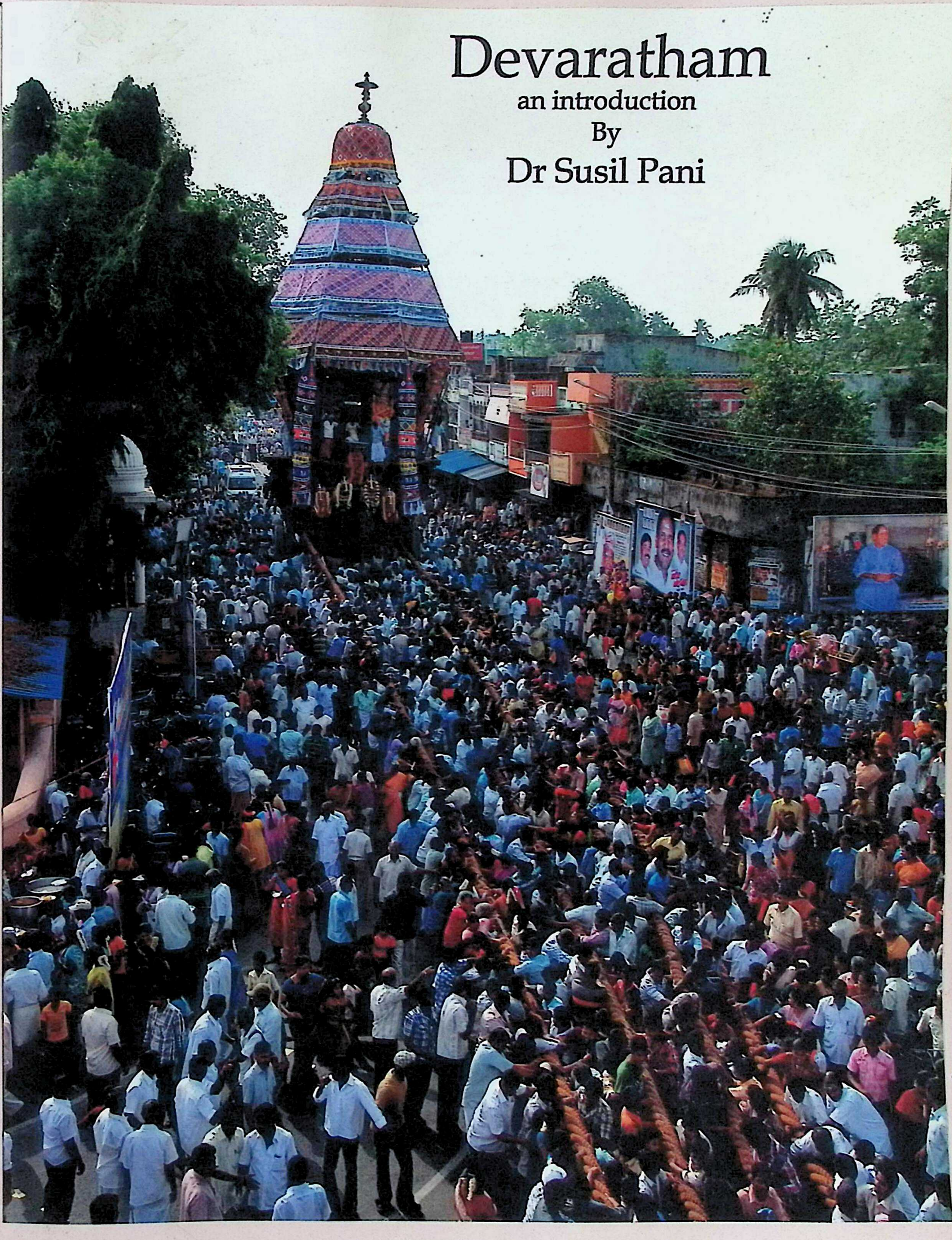


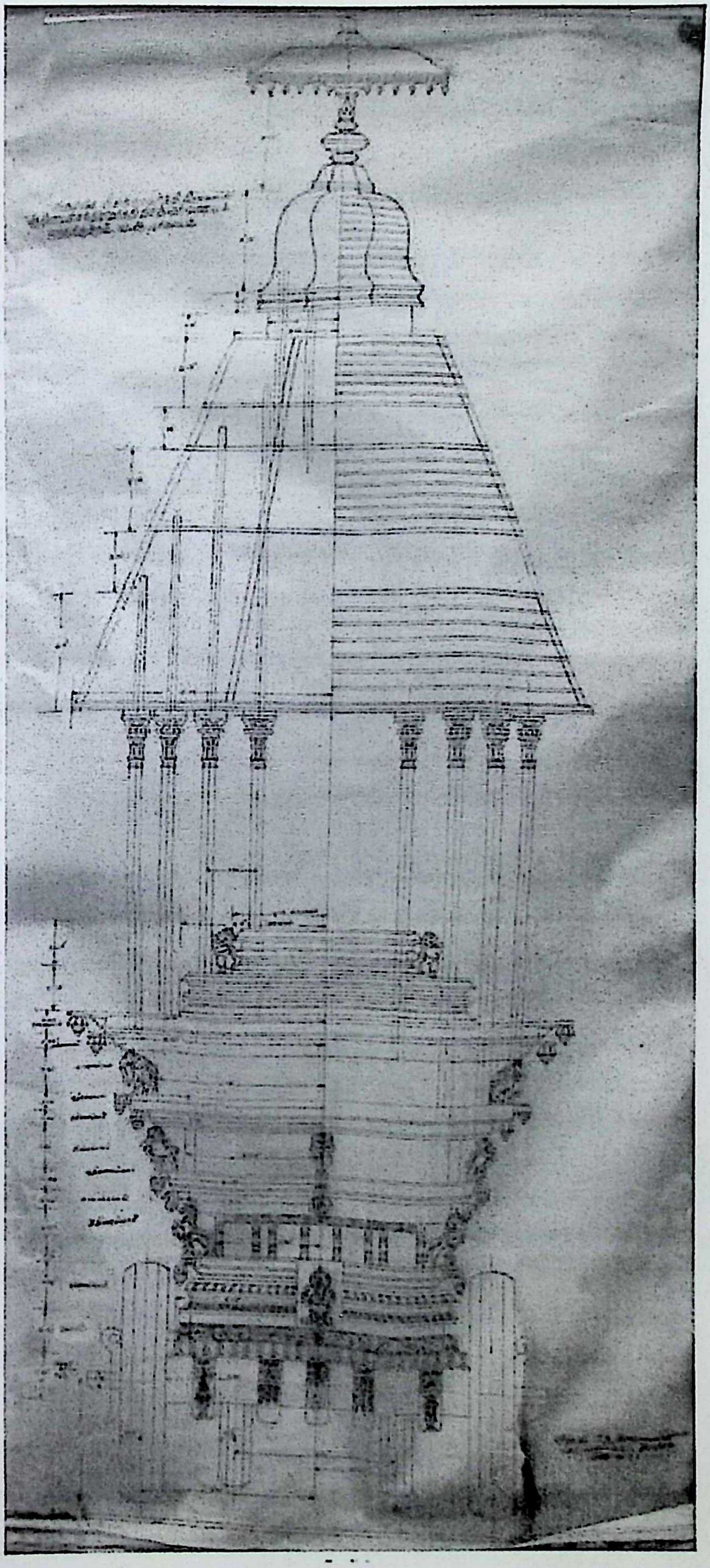


Figure No A

A complete original blue print of the architectural design of a devaratham for Perumal Kovil made by Stapati T K Rajamani, showing extensive measurement details of the entire devaratham to include the outer and inner wheels,axle, ani, pancha bhootapar at the base, upapitha, sarathi, poodalaipar, simhapar, gajapar, therthetu, devasana,shimha on shimhasana, pada, vimana, kalasa, grivha, gala,dwaja and the filial.

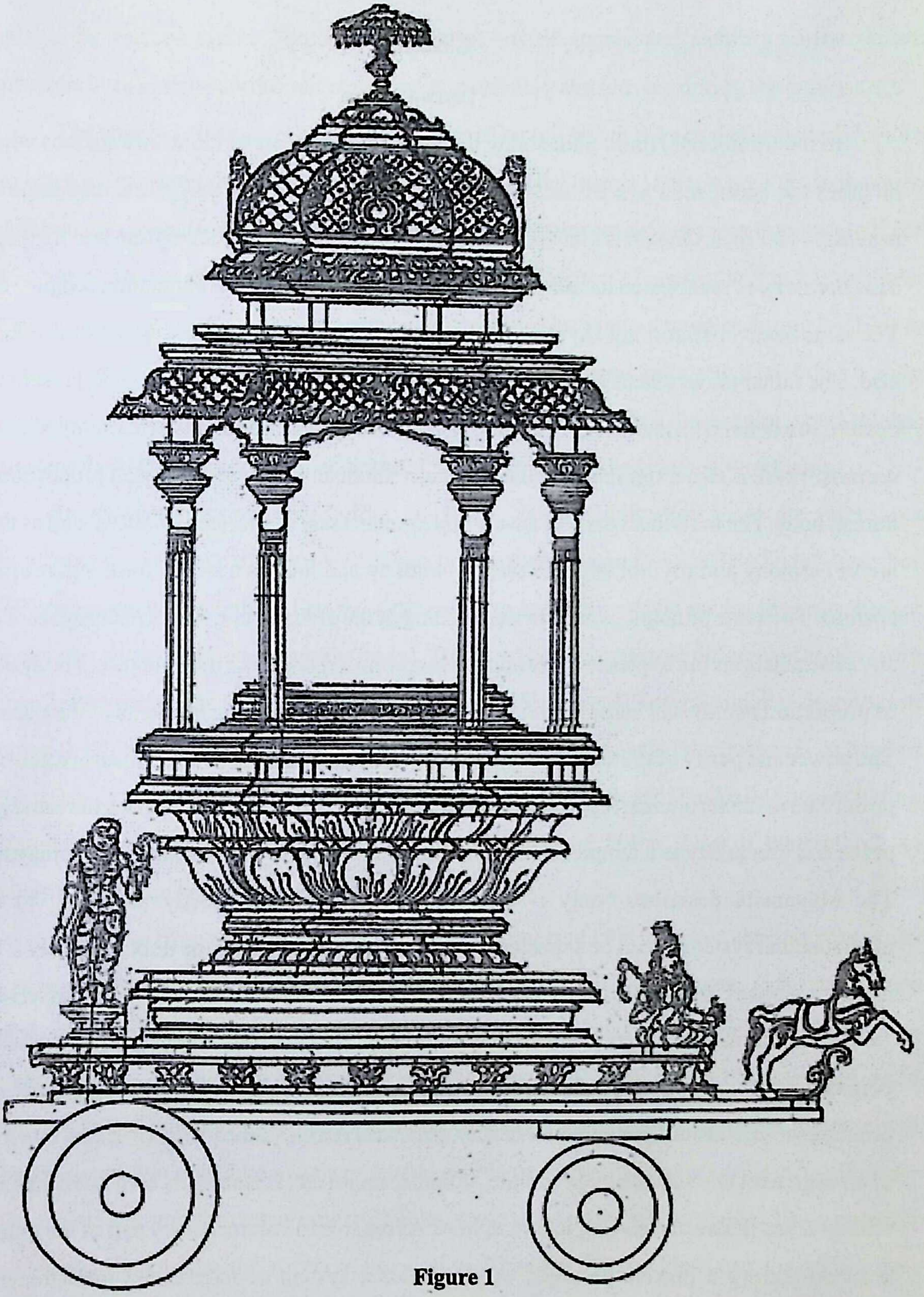


Figure 1

Simple devaratham-mostly made from silver or gold complete with wheels, base, horses, Brahma, Vimana, Dwaja, and Kalasa etc. They are very simple in design with the front wheels smaller then the back wheels. It is tilted to the front when stationary and thus can easily be pulled during the rathayatra.

Chapter -I

Introduction

In the traditional Hindu philosophy the individual is a part of the whole cosmos which includes the earth, solar system and beyond. One experiences this only if one develops the necessary faculties. One feels that the seen and the unseen are in perfect rhythm and harmony. This harmony is manifested in various art forms like music, dance, architecture, temples etc. The same beauty of harmony, rhythm and fine sense of proportion is manifested in the ratham also. The ratham is an extension of the temple architecture, which is an attempt to present the cosmos in a defined form. It follows the fine principles of proportion and is in harmony with the cosmos. There is also a significant and analogous relationship with that of a well proportioned human body. The individual parts of a well-built human body are perfectly built as well as they are in harmony and rhythm with the rest of the body and thus as a whole form a part of the cosmos. The same principle is used in the building of the devaratham, which not only resolves any contradictions but expresses pure and uncompromised details of the structure. The system of proportion manifests a sense of coherence and harmony among the elements of the ratham. The power and purity of the structure radiates from the exact proportion and measurements as prescribed in the scriptures. A perfectly and meticulously crafted ratham radiates the same joy, peace and tranquility as a temple. Hence it is called as temple in motion during the rathayatra. The Mayamata describes "only if a temple is constructed correctly according to the mathematical system, it can be expected to function in harmony with the universe. Only if the measurements of the temple is in every way perfect, there will be perfection in the universe as well" As much as one enjoys every aspect of a temple, similarly one enjoys the ratham, while performing arati, puja, parikrama etc, one is perceiving (accessing) an aspect of the whole. The principle of Vaastushastra is to render beauty, structural stability and quality of spaces by virtue of arrangement and management of light, volume, sound etc. It creates its own ambience and vibration and draws the devotee into its sphere. As regards to volume, every part of the ratham is controlled by a precise principle of proportional system of interrelated measurements maintaining the unity of the architecture and the individual sculpture. The measurements of the components of the ratham like the Chakram, Pada, Upapitha, Vimana and Simhasana are related by various ratios. These lend aesthesis, visual appeal and stability to the ratham structure both in static and kinetic states (when stationary and moving during the rathayatra).

The temple rathams are generally made up of wood, which is a perishable material, more so when exposed to rain, dirt, pollution etc. Almost all the temple rathams are kept in the open without any cover. Hence all the temple cars existing at present are not more than two to three hundred years old. But the rathams represent the architecture of ancient and medieval India both in style and design. There had been an explosion of building of temples during the 10th to 14th century CE. Many of these temples have thousand pillared halls with each pillar having many carvings of gods, apsaras, goddesses etc. During this period all the temples whether large and small had their own temple car. Some of the larger temples had two to five rathams.

In the Vedic times, long before the Indus Valley Civilization there are references indicating the presence of chariots for Gods or Devarathams. In fact the "Rig Veda" describes different parts of the ratham like the aksha, chakra and kosa (aksha means the axle, chakra means the wheel and kosa means the body). The word ratham appear in different contexts more than 1500 times in the Rig Veda alone. The "Atharva Veda" and "Tritiya-samhita" describes in detail the Rathamukha – the face of the ratham. The crowning part of the ratham is its head or the rathasira. The various types of rathams are the vahanas for most of the Vedic gods including Varuna, Indra, Agni, Surya, Savitri, Aswins, Marutas and Ushas. One of the methods to identify the Vedic gods is by their ratham.

It is clear from the above description that the concept of rathams or chariots relating to various gods and goddesses has been there right from the Vedic times. It became more elaborate in the later period of the Puranas. It is well known that during the period of Ramayana various types of rathams were used for different purposes. The king and his ministers used rathams for military purposes; the common people used rathams for transport of goods and to attend social functions like marriage, thread ceremony, house warming (griha-pravesha) etc. During the festivals the utshava murti of gods, was placed on the ratham called "Devaratham", and were taken out on the streets in procession. Thus the God/goddess came out from their abode to bless their devotees.

In the Ramayana, Ravana had taken Sita to Lanka by a ratham which could fly like a bird called Puspak Vimana, it was later used by Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya along with Sita, Lakshman and others. It is said that this ratham was made by the Devatas, but which was forcefully taken by Ravana after he defeated them in a war. It is said that this vimana had the power to cover large distances at the speed of the wind.

In the fourth BCE Kautilya in his "Arthasasthra" describes three types of rathams. They are called military, domestic and religious rathas. The last is the "Devaratham" meant for the gods or devatas. There are inscriptions by Ashoka the Great describing temple rathams and festivals associated with them. There are several inscriptions in many temples in South India describing donors of temple rathams, various rituals and ceremonies (padhaties) connected with ratha-uthsava and rathayatra from the early first century till the seventeenth century CE. It is out of the scope of this present work to go into these details.

There are several temples with mandapas built like chariots. These are stationary. The individual gods had their own rathams with unique features. The sun god, Surya has a chariot with seven horses and a single wheel and is said to be constantly travelling with blazing light, golden in color, with his two consorts. The temple of Konark in Orissa dedicated to Lord Surya is designed like a huge chariot with several wheels on either side with giant horses in galloping posture. There is a small beautiful stone ratham in the Vitthala temple in Hampi in Karnataka.

One of the classifications of the ratham is according to their usage; they are designed differently for each purpose for which they are used. Sangramik Ratha- These are for the purpose of fighting or sangrama, hence they are used during wars. Deva Ratha- These rathams are used for the Gods and Goddesses with their uthsava murti during various festivals of the temple. Karni Ratha- A special ratha for women particularly queens, when they travel inside or outside their kingdom. Some of the rich women of the society like the wives of the king and ministers also use such rathams. Vainayik Ratha- These rathams are designed to train persons to learn drive a Ratham. Pushya Ratha- These are special rathams used in processions by the king during special events like after victory in a war, marriage of the princes, swayambara of the princesses" etc. Kreeda Ratha- These are designed for competitions like chariot races.

Temple rathams have been built across the entire Indian subcontinent from the Himalayas in the north to Srilanka in south and from Pakistan in the west to Indonesia in the east. But the art of building temple cars with elaborate carvings in multiples tiers have only survived in southern India, more so in small pockets of the present states of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Andhrapradesh and Odisha.

The rathakaras are the chariot or temple car makers who are also called as "Sthapati" in Tamilnadu. They are very traditional people and their art has been transferred from one generation to the next without break for more than one thousand years. This is typical "Vamsa Parampara" (less intense than a guru parampara.) Their particular art form is limited to certain families residing in small villages in southern states of India. These include Karaikudi, Thiruvatighai, Kallakuruchi, Avinashi, Thanjore etc in Tamilnadu.

There are several inscriptions all over South India describing various aspects of temple car festivals, particularly about the grand festival – the Brahma uthsava, the paraphernalia to be followed in conducting such festival, the duties of the rathakaras, the structural details to be followed in making of the ratham, and the remuneration to be given to rathakaras. It is out of the scope of this book to go into the details of these inscriptions.

Ratha Prathistha–Padhati literally means the rules and regulations to be followed for the consecration of the new ratham on completion of its construction before it can be used for the rathayatra. „Kumaratanta' describes the rituals to be followed in a Subramanya temple after the temple ratham is ready for the rathayatra every year. The Agama Shastras describe the rules and regulations to be followed for pulling the ratham during the rathayatra and the ratha-uthsava.

The "Shilpasastra" forms the basis for the construction of the devaratham. Shilpa literally means an icon figure, mostly of the gods and goddesses, and Shastras means book of knowledge and principles. Hence Shilpa shastra means the knowledge of the principles, rules, and regulations to be followed in making the Shilpa or idol of the god, goddess, etc. The person or the artist who makes this Shilpa is called a shilpi. The Shilpa may be made from any material like stone, wood, silver, and gold, it may even be a painting on a palm leaf, cloth, silk, paper, patta-chitra etc. The makers of rathams were called as rathakaras and the master among them as "Sthapati" or they are the guru among the artists.

Similarly Vaasthusastra deals with the knowledge of vasthu or material science. Thus Vaasthusastra deals with a wider spectrum which includes all kinds of material – wood, earth, lime, stone, iron, sand, etc. It also deals with the use of these materials in the construction of various kinds of structures like temple, house, palace or town or even a kingdom.

The tradition of "Guru Shishya" parampara (teacher–disciple relationship) has been present in India since the time of the Vedas. A great deal of knowledge has been passed from one generation to the next over hundreds of years by this method. This has helped in keeping alive the purity of the tradition over centuries without much change. There is always some spiritual experience and a truth behind each art form. The truth always remains embedded in the art left by the artist for posterity, which can be perceived by the observer. This is true for most of the traditional art and culture of India, which includes classical music, dance, folk arts, carvings on the temple, and building of the temples, etc. Hence this is also true for the making of the temple cars - the devaratham. The knowledge of making ratham has passed from one generation of rathakaras to the next without break, mostly as a family tradition. The rathakara may or may not be aware of the exact shastra they follow, but they use the knowledge and skill passed on to them from their forefathers very faithfully to produce flawlessly the ratham exactly as per the shastra. Hence even though the present devarathams are a few decades to a couple of centuries old, the style of presentation is same as that of the devarathams of the ancient and medieval India. The period of the Cholas in South India forms the glorious and golden phase of temple building activities. Hence during this period the art of making temple rathams and the ratha-uthsava got more and more elaborate. It became well established due to the patronage of the kings. The first golden ratham is supposed to have been donated by King Sundara Pandya. The devarathams continued to be perfected due to constant support from the Vijayanagara Kings (in Karnataka) and Nayak Kings (in Madurai in Tamilnadu).

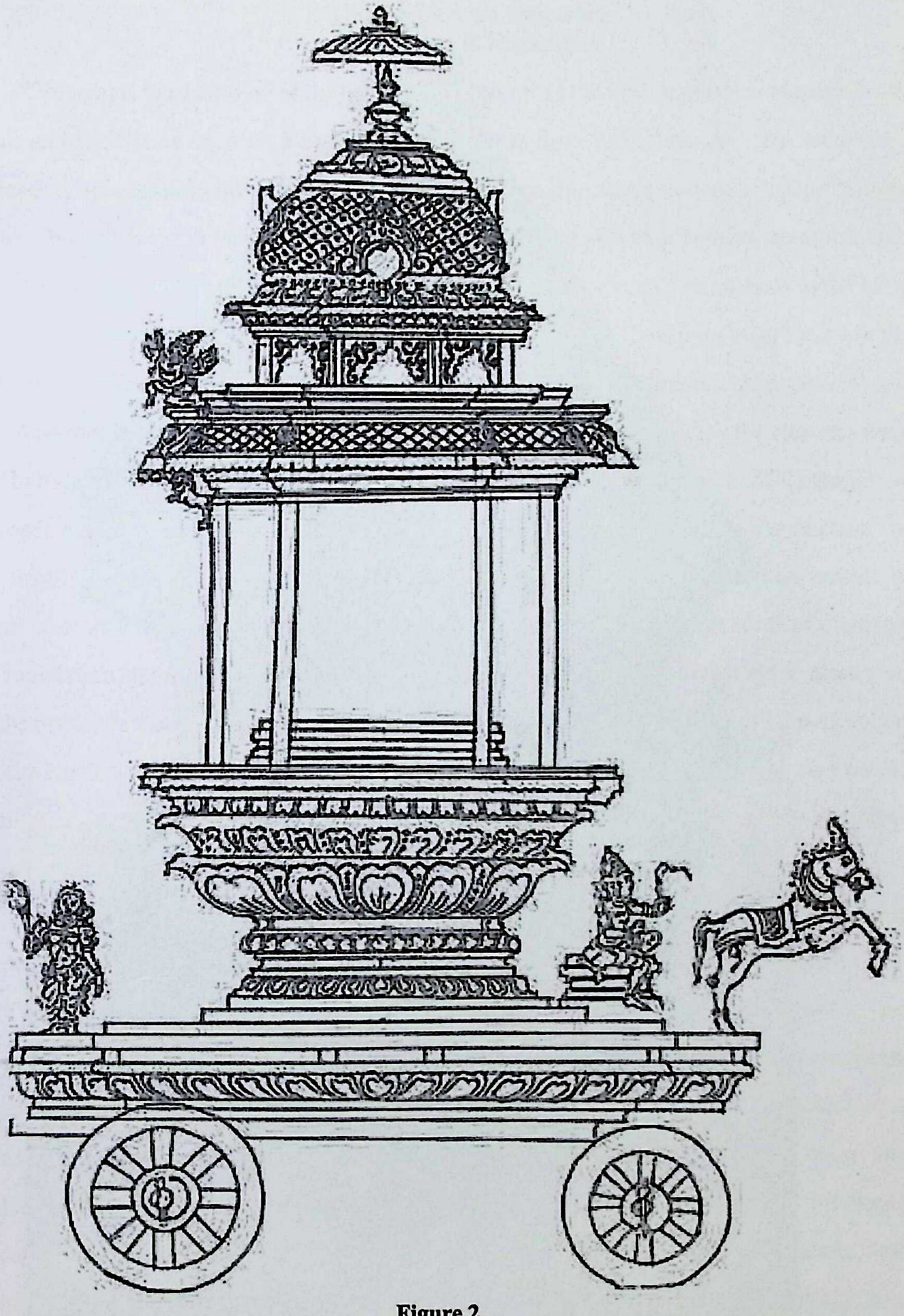
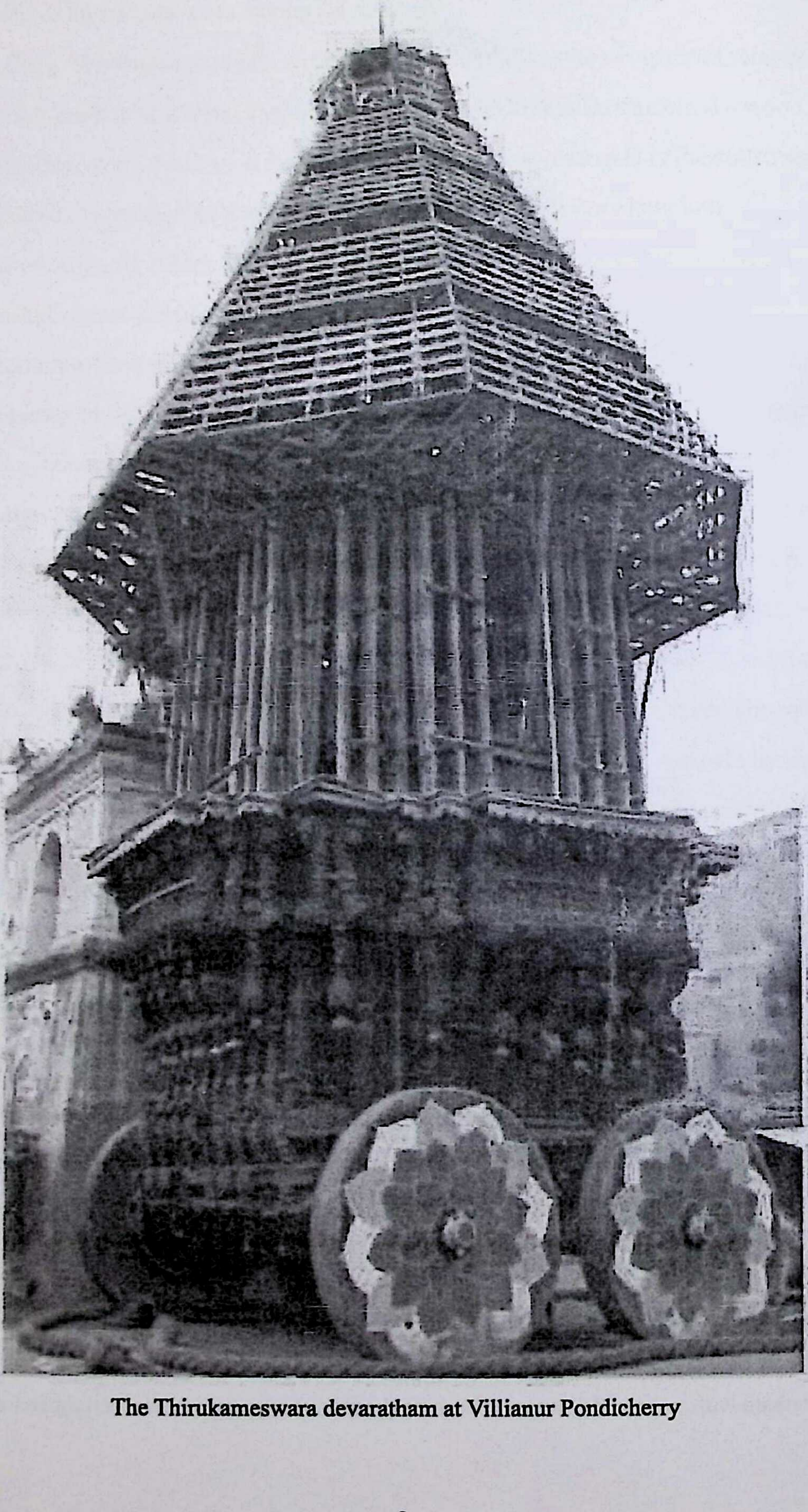


Figure 2

Devaratham with two tier devasana, undecorated pillars, decorated vimana, sarathi and chouli bearer



The Thirukameswara devaratham at Villianur Pondicherry

The Ratham an over-view

Stapati Sri K Rajamani

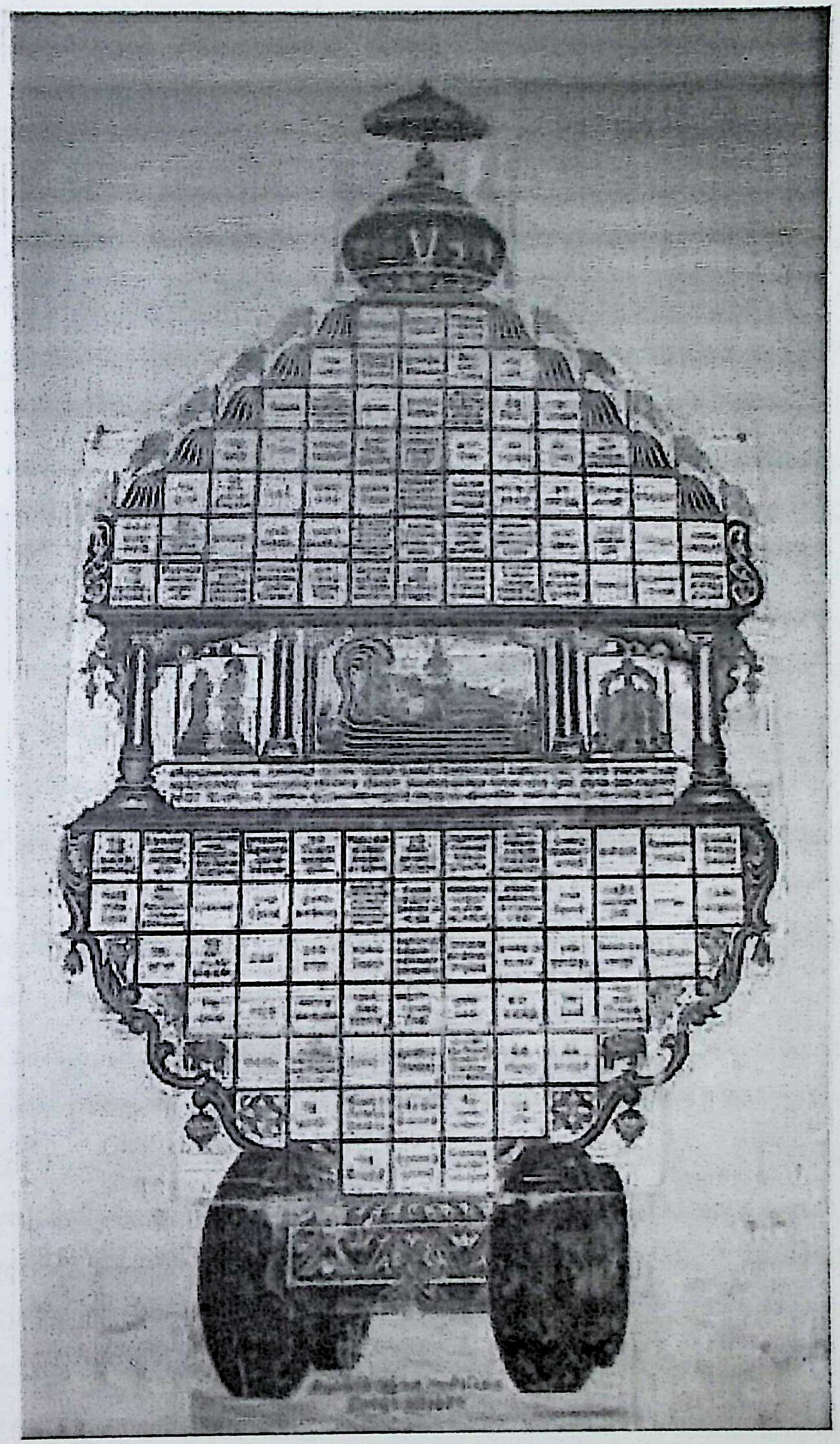
"Vinayaga, the destroyer of the obstacles in the path to the lord, grant us noble words and deeds and enrich our life with knowledge, we worship thee oh Vighnaraja". The traditional scales of time are divided into four different yugas and contain events that are linked with those times. The first is the "kredhya Yuga" and it is said to be the period of Ramayana and is thus linked with the Ayodhya nagara. The second is the "Threthadya Yuga" which ends in the early life time of Krishna and is thus linked with Dwaraka nagara. The "Dwapara Yuga" starts in the lifetime of Sri Krishna and is linked with the Mahabharata and the Indraprastha nagara. Now is the "Kali-yuga" which is said to be about 17000 years old. In all the yugas the rathams were said to be present and used for different purposes. It is said that on the eight day of Karthigai, on a Monday, in the Dwapara Yuga the foundation done of Arunachaleswara temple was laid. On the twelfth of the same month on Friday the foundation of the holy Nataraja temple at Chidambaram was also laid. Similarly in the same year on the tenth day of month of Chittarai the foundation stone of Thiruvarur Thyagaraja temple was laid. It is said that in the same year on the twenty first day in month of Vaikasi the foundation stone of the temple of Thirukkadiyar Amrita Koateswaran was laid and on the sixth day in the month of Aswini of the same year the foundation stone of Thiruvanaikoil , Sri Jambugeswar temple was laid. The above describes the traditional time scale when each temple was built.

It is said that all the sculptures of the temple and the idols are made by the direct descendents of Lord Viswakarma, hence they are traditionally referred as viswakarmas. It is only in the Dwapara Yuga that the devaratham or the temple chariots were built for the first time and the ratha uthsava celebrated. In the period prior to that the uthsava murti were seated directly on their respective vahanas and carried by men. Sometimes the uthsavamurti were placed on decorative palanquins and either carried by men directly or placed on a cart and pulled by bullocks. With passage of time the rathams came into the forefront for the major uthsava like the Brahma uthsava when the uthsava murti was placed on the ratham with elaborate decorations and pulled along, around the village and the temple. Slowly over hundreds of years the rathams became bigger and elaborate both in design and decorations to reach its zenith in the medieval India around 600 to 700 CE.

There is an inscription in front of the sanctum-sanctum of Chidambaram Nataraja temple which describes the measurement tool called Muzhangol, which is used for the construction of the temples and the devarathams. The Stapati who were responsible to build the devarathams were placed highly in the society and were honoured by the king. The kings were the chief patrons for making the rathams.

There are many legends associated with the devarathams and rathayatra. The devaratham at the Thyagaraja temple at Thiruvarur is considered to be the biggest in south India. It is said that when the son of the king Manumedhi Chola was riding a ratham in the streets of Thiruvarur, a young calf was killed accidentally underneath the wheels of the speeding ratham. The mother cow was a witness to the rash driving of the ratham by the young prince. The cow went on crying and reached the palace in the middle of the night and pulled the rope attached with the bell for justice. The king immediately ordered the minister to find out the reason for the cow coming to the palace. The minister saw the cow which had rung the bell with tears rolling down the eyes. The cow started to run towards the place of accident with the minister following her. The minister reached the site of the accident and seeing the dead calf understood the grief of the mother cow. He enquired about the cause of the death of the calf. By evening the king came to know the truth and the sequence of the day's event. The king was grief-stricken and wanted to give suitable justice to the mother cow, so he ordered his only son to lie down on the same place where the calf had died and drove a chariot on him and sacrificed him. Thus he gave justice to the cow. The whole world came to know about this and praised his judgment. The chariot helped him carry out the correct judgment. At last Lord Thyagaraja of Thiruvarur appeared before him leaving his cow form and blessed him for his balanced judgment. He revived the king's son and with this disappeared as a jyoti – a bright light.

King Pari was the king of a small kingdom among the Permbu hills. Once he was traveling leisurely and enjoying the beauty of the hillocks of Permbu. While enjoying the beauty of the countryside he noticed a special type of jasmine plant called Mullai, which was swaying its head in search of a support to crawl on. The king at once left the ratham in which he had come near the plant for the vine to creep on it and find support. He then returned from the forest to his palace by walking. This compassionate consideration for all living beings, strong



The painting at the eastern entrance of the Sarangapani Vishnu temple in Kumbhakonam in Tamilnadu, south India depicting the chitra kavi.

Its somnolence founded the universe

or weak, big or small including the plants and animals living in his kingdom made the King loved by all and the ratham helped him to bring him fame and glory.

The famous epic of "Silapathikaram" describes in detail the ratham and the ratha utshava. Elongo Adigal the author of the Silapathikaram particularly sings praises of the Indiram festival. Another important Tamil literary work Manimeghalai mentions the ratha uthsava as an important festival. Seetahalai Sathanar the editor of Manimeghalai mentions about the glory of the devarathams. In the olden days there used to be a grand rathaushtava at Pompuhar and to witness it even nobles and kings of nearby areas used to come with their royal chariots, armies, elephants etc.. Similarly in the literary work of "Kalingathuporani", the author gives a reference to the ratham. In the Elthuogai also there is mention of the ratham. In Erayanar kalaviyar, there is a note about the ratham; the author compares the chaste women with the elegance of the devaratham. From the above references the vital impact rathams and rathayatras had on the socio religious life of people through ages is evident.

Shiva as Tripurantaka is accredited with destroying three mythical cities of the asuras. Out of eight legends narrating Shiva's role as the destroyer of evil, the Tripura-samhara (Destruction of the three citadels) legend relates to the destruction of the three evil cities - Tripura by Shiva.

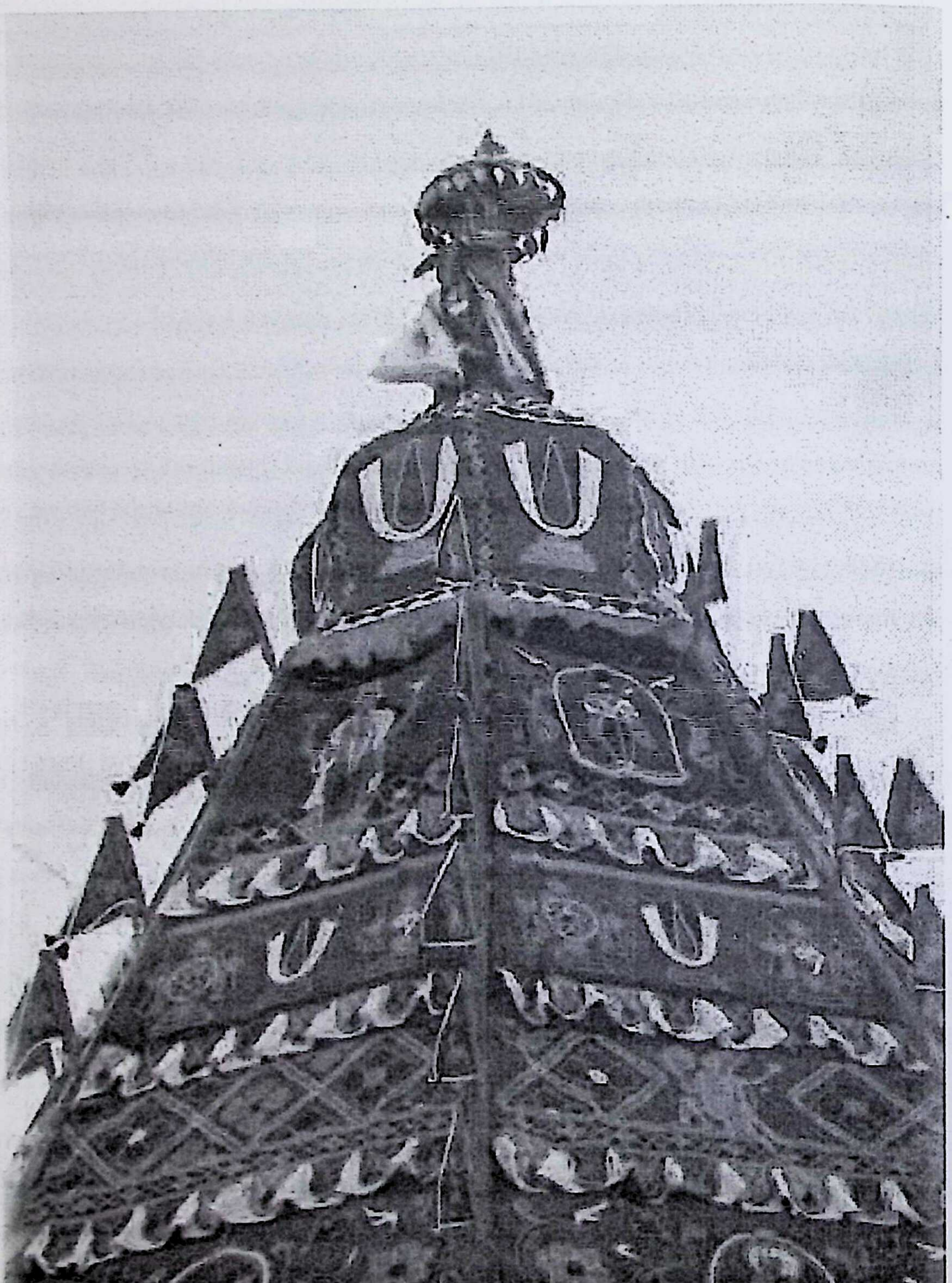
The demon Taraka had three off-springs named Taarakaaksha, Kamalaaksha and Vidyunmaali. These demon princes performed severe penance towards the creator-god Brahma and obtained the boon of immense power. Brahma, on being pleased with them, presented each of them with an aerial city revolving in the sky. The legend further states that these three cities or forts (Tripura) continued to revolve in the sky for hundreds of years. In the course of revolving, the three would converge very rarely. The boon granted them that they would live for a thousand years in the three invincible, moving cities and that they would be destroyed only by an arrow that could merge the three forts into one, and set them to fire. The demons, armed with this boon, wreaked havoc on the universe. The asuras well-entrenched in their aerial cities would mount attacks on the devatas (gods) and the rishis (sages), and harass them. Ultimately, the gods and the sages approached Shiva and pleaded for his assistance in removing this menace. Lord Shiva agreed to help them and waited for an opportune moment.

At the end of the stipulated time period, Shiva created a bow and an arrow and a chariot with the various gods and goddesses and components of the universe. The moment the three aerial cities converged, Shiva mounted on his chariot and moved upwards. He took out his bow and arrow, and hit the converged cities with a single arrow. With Brahma as the charioteer, he sped across, and shot a single arrow of fire, which was created of none other than Vishnu. The cosmic arrow destroyed the three cities. The components of the Tripurantaka are, Chariot: Pritvi (The Earth), Charioteer: Brahma, Chariot Wheels: Sun and Moon, Bow: Mount Meru, Bow String: Serpent Vasuki, Arrow: Vishnu.

In another legend it is said that lord Shiva as Thirupurantaka Samharà murti , rode the ratham made by Viswakarma with lord Agni as the base, Lord Chandra as the middle part and Lord Vishnu as the upper part, he thus killed the three giant asuras. In another legend the Earth itself acts as the ratham for lord Shiva with lord Brahma as the Sarathi, with lord Vishnu and other gods and goddesses helping him. Lord Agni forms the arrow with which Shiva fights to defeat and destroy the Thirupurantaka asuras.

One version of the myth maintains that, finally when everything was ready for the Tripura invasion, the devatas were proud that only with their help is Shiva going to destroy the Tripuras. But to the astonishment of all, Shiva didn't use any of the war machinery arranged by the Devas. The god smiled and in that smile the three puras were destroyed. This has a great symbolism, the three asuras represent the three metals: iron, silver and gold, each again symbolic of the different attractions of the material world, and it is only Shiva who has conquered them. Some even say that the three represent the physical, vital and the mental spheres of life and praying to Shiva will help us to transcend beyond them and to enable us to find our soul or divine within.

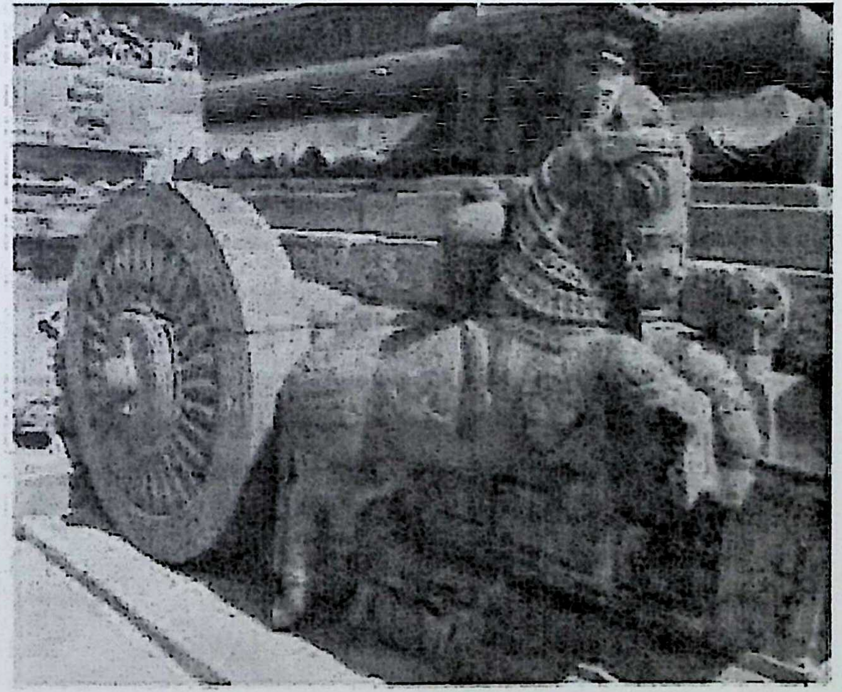
It is well known that bullock carts were definitely used by the 1500 BCE as evident from the material remains of the Indus valley civilization. By the third century BCE, i.e. the period of Chandragupt Maurya and Kautilya' iron was widely being used and there are references to rathmusala or fixation of iron weapons with the ratham. This is a brief description of some of the great legends associated with the rathams.



Applique covering the vimana of Perumal kovil devaratham at Puducherry.

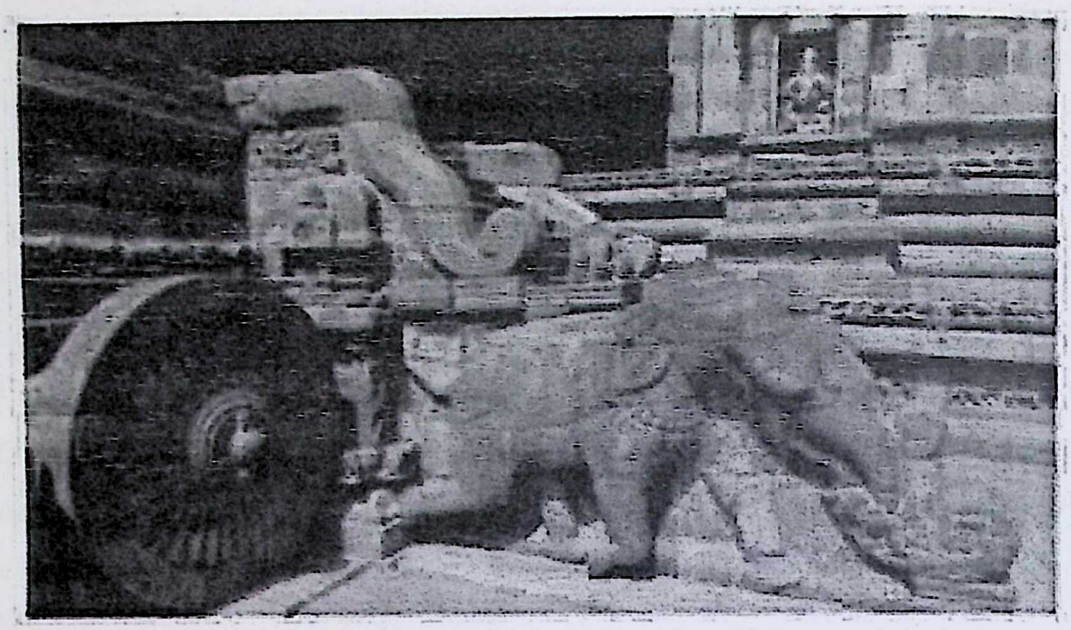
History of devaratham

The temple car is not just a monument of architectural and iconographical excellence; it is an institution which is deep-rooted in the socio-economic and religious traditions of the Indian society. As an institution it acquired a multi-dimensional character, encompassing the entire fabric of society, only in the medieval period. It had an evolutionary process of development, including the pre-historic roots of Indian culture, reaching the acme under Vijayanagara around the 15th century CE. In the pre Pallava period (4th- 6th centuries CE) the temple car began to gain prominence in Tamilagam. The earliest car festivals are described in the Silappadikaram and Manimeghalai. The former refers to the car festivals of the Buddhist god Arukan. The term Kadavul ther (god's chariot) is interpreted as the chariot of the sun god and not his temple. In addition to gods, reputed citizens of the state were also honored by being taken around in public procession seated on the ratham. Thus, Madhavi the noted dancing girl of the Puhar was taken around the city in a ceremonial procession in a ratham, when she received the Talaikkol award for her proficiency in dancing. During the Indran festival in Puhar, Alamarselvanmagan (son of god seated below the Banyan tree, Ficus bengalensis, i.e., Murugan, son of Siva) was taken around in procession seated on an elephant vahana placed on



The galloping horse drawing the ratham, Darasuram Shiva temple

I will bear with him the ancient Mother's load,



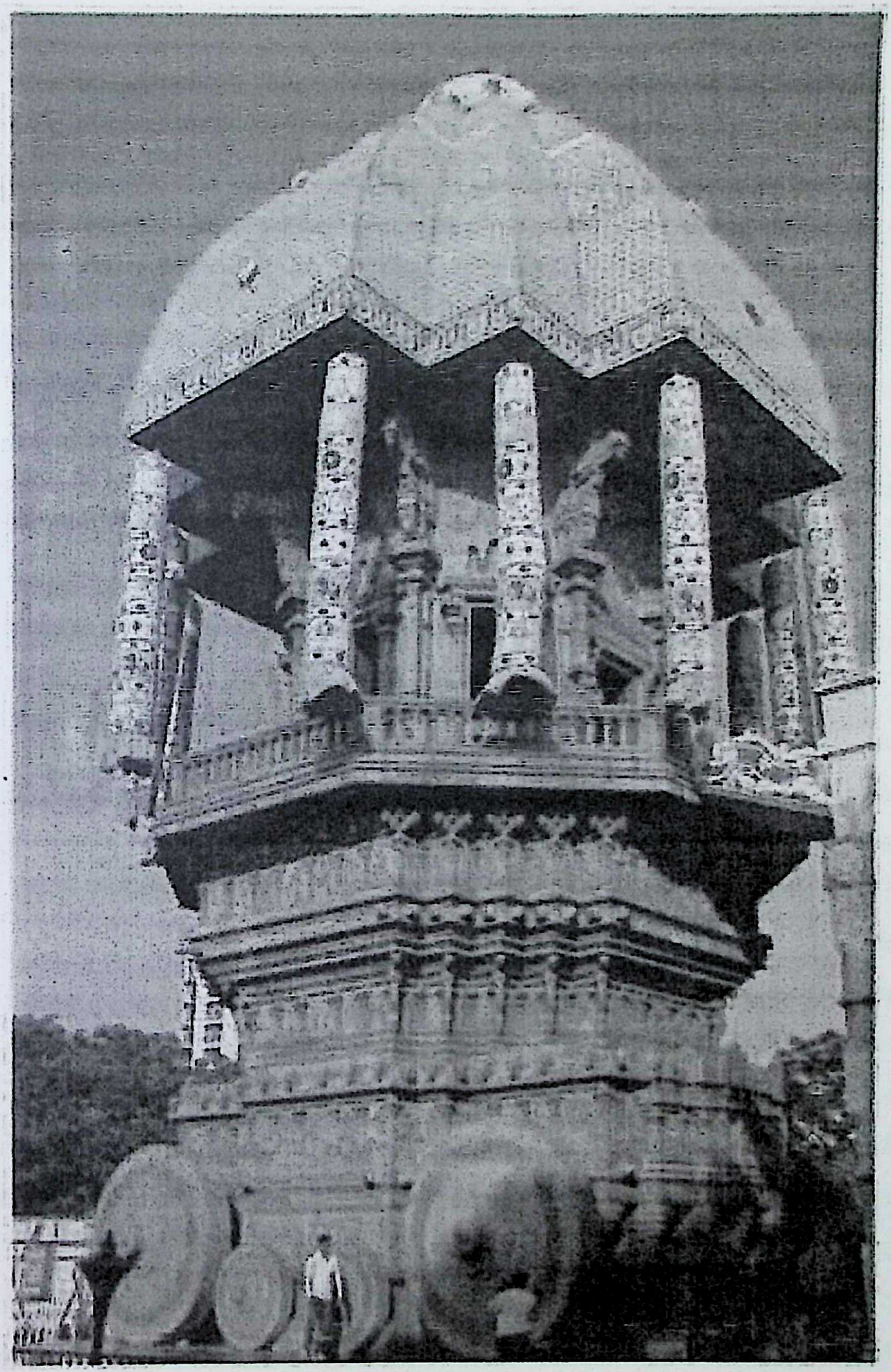
The steps leading to the temple at Darasuram has a beautifully carved elephant

Some face of deathless beauty could be caught

a ratham. The ratham seems to be a cakadai or cattather, a simple form of ratham. Thervidi (Car Street) also figures prominently in the twin epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) which stand for "the street in which procession of the temple ratham moves". Thus the temple cars secured a place in the socio-economic life of the Tamils and became an established institution by the end of the medieval period.

Ratham devamayam virpra sarvademayam tatha
Sarvayajnamayam....
"The ratham is an embodiment of the god, an embodiment of all gods;
An embodiment of all sacrifices..."

This is the introductory verse to the description of devaratham in the Vishnutatvasamhita. It highlights the importance of temple ratham. By exalting the temple ratham to the position of gods and sacrifices, its cosmic symbolism is indicated. In its structural designs and its ritualistic aspects, temple rathams are symbolic of the cosmos. The ratham is *sthula* (gross or less aware or less conscious) in nature which is the characteristic of the earth. In the *Puranas Bhudevi* (Mother Earth) is said to have served as the ratham of Siva as *Tripurantaka* in his war against the demons. In mythology, the world is said to be supported by the hood of *Adisesha,* the primeval serpent, who is himself coiled upon the back of *Kurma* (the



The huge devaratham build at Thiruvaluvarkottam in Chennai made from granite by late V Ganapati stapathi

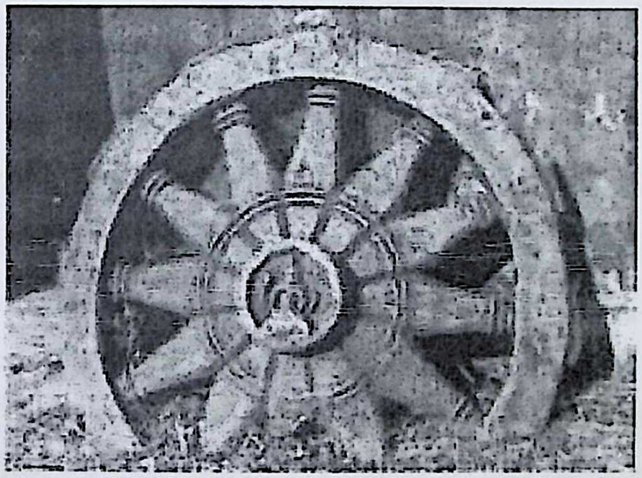
From the soiled passionate ritual of our hopes *Captured into wide breadthsof soaring stone*

The granite devaratham of Vitala temple in Hampi, Karnataka.
It blooms for ever at the feet of God

tortoise who is supposed to be non-other than Vishnu), floating on the primal waters. It is also supported by four elephants and helped by four giants. This principle is well illustrated in the devaratham by the presence of Adishesha, Kurma, elephants and Bhutha ganas as bearers of the ratham at its base in the front side. The theme of sculptures depicting the neither world, life of human beings, celestial beings with their heavenly world also suggests the cosmic symbolism of the temple car. The recitation of the *Purushasuktha Mantram* (a verse in the Rig Veda) at the time of *ratha prathistha* (consecration of ratham), also suggests the same idea indicating the cosmic genesis of the ratham. Thus the temple ratham was treated as a symbol of cosmos. It was again believed that the donation of a ratham or wood for making a ratham procured admission into *Vaikuntha* (abode of Vishnu). So, temples considered it meritorious to possess rathams. Kings, nobles and individuals contributed funds for building of temple rathams and the maintenance of the chariots.

Puranas give clue to the origin of temple rathams and ratha festivals. It is attributed to Brahma, the God of Creation in the Hindu Trinity. It is said that Brahma instituted ratha uthsava (festival) with a view to expatiate himself from the sins accrued by him. Thus the name Brahma utshava is synonymous with the ratha utshava. Muchukunda the traditional Chola king is also said to have instituted chariot festival to expatiate himself from his sin. Thus the mythological events trace the origin of temple cars. It also seems likely that in the medieval period the kings believed and accepted that their power and prosperity was due to the grace of God. Hence the kings, nobles and rich people started contributing towards the development of the temple and so all the paraphernalia and appendages of a royal court were added to the temple. Thus the temples were endowed with an audience hall, dancing hall, bed chamber, vahanas, and attendant servants like the devadasis, crown, lion-throne, flag, umbrella and rathams. The god gave audience to the people by coming out of the temple in their Utshava-murti seated on the chariot to give darsan and listen to their prayers. That is why Ula literary works had either a God (e.g. Teiva Ula and Tiruvannaikkaula) or King (e.g. Kulottungacolanula and Rajarajacolanula) as their hero. The streets in which the temple car procession took place were also known as Rajavithi. Again it is supposed that by taking Gods in public processions the untouchable communities who had no access to the temple were provided with an opportunity to have darsan of God.

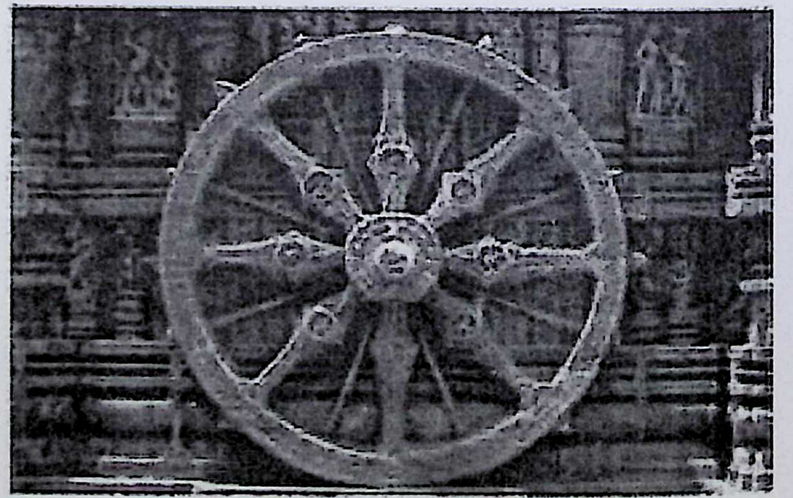
In due course the Kings declared themselves as the servitors of god and some went to the extent of declaring themselves as the first servitor of the Lord. Hence in Puri the foremost servitor of Lord Jaganath is the King of Puri who performs the ceremonial sweeping of the ratham of Lord Jaganath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra at the time of rathayatra. The kings also claimed legitimacy to be in power as the chief servitor of God. The bhakti cult prevalent during the times of Chitanya Mahaprabhu in the later half of 16th century CE also had its impact, with the kings contributing to the development of the ritual of the temple processions and rathayatra.



A wheel from a temple in Balasore, distict, Orissa .
(photo by Dr Subas Pan)
Eternised a swift moment's memory

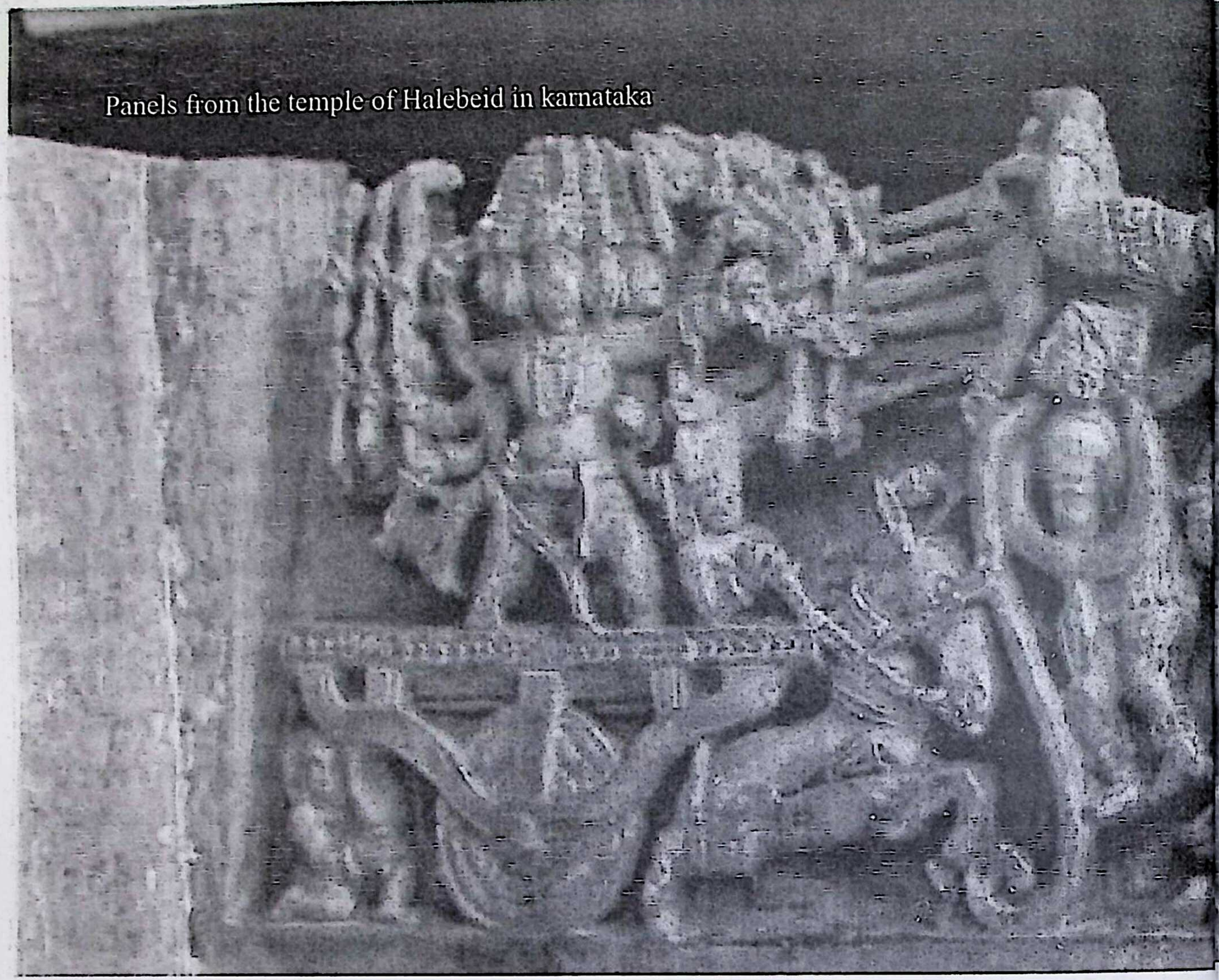
According to the data provided by the hymns of the Alwars and Nayanmars some 382 temples (108 for Vishnu and 274 for Shiva) are said to have existed during the early medieval period. The Pallavas of Kanchipuram and the Pandyas of Madurai were the pioneers in inaugurating the great saga of temple building. From the same source we come to know that some twenty four temples celebrated festivals with rathams. Appar describes Siva being taken out in procession on the ratham at Tiruvarur and Tiruvinnambar as Alitthervittakan (Lord of the wheeled chariot). The verse on the kutthan (dancer i.e., Nataraja) at Thillai denotes him as the dancer who is mounted on a chariot.

Kings of the Chola dynasty like Kulothunga I, Vikrama Chola and Kulothunga II extended their patronage to temple rathams. In 1135 CE Vikrama Chola provided the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with a golden ratham decorated with numerous strings of large pearls. Ottakutthar also credits Kulothunga II with a similar donation to the same temple. While his father donated a golden ratham for Shiva as Nataraja, he built the Tirukkammakkotam (Amman shrine) and donated a similar ratham for Amman. These are the earliest references to golden ratham so far traceable. The golden elephant described by Tiruttakkattevar is probably the first description of a golden vahana for a temple. Kulothunga I and Vikrama Chola donated such vehicles to the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram. Purucottamannambi, a contributing author to the ninth Thirumurai, acclaims that the devaratham festival at Chidambaram was celebrated every year without fail as well as that it is one of the best. This indicates that the annual car festival could have been suspended at times in some of the temples due to financial or other reasons. The Kadava chief, Kopperunjinga, made gifts to the Chidambaram temple for conducting the ratha uthsava and the recital of Vedas during the processional march. His son Kadava Kumara donated among other things a chariot for Amman (Parvati) of the Arunachaleshwara temple at Thiruvanamalai. The inscription in the temple of Arunachaleswara at Thiruvanamalai is of particular interest because the donated ratham is called as Nanmughather (the four-faced ratham). Among the Pandyas, Sundara Pandya rendered significant



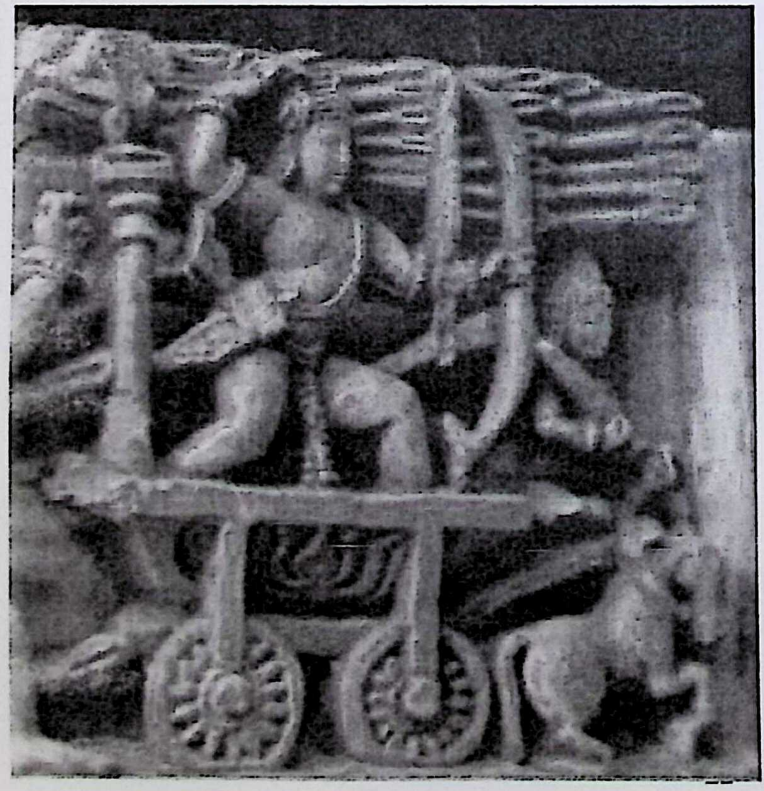
The famous wheel of the Black Pogoda, Sun temple, Konarak, Orissa (photo by Dr Subas Pani)

A fire along the mystic paths of earth services to the Sri Ranganatha temple at Srirangam. According to the Kovil Olugu, a traditional register of the temple properties, his benefactions included a golden boat, golden ratham and other golden vehicles. He also contributed to the construction of a water tank for conducting a grand floating car festival known as Thappather. Since the 12th century CE floating rathams became popular in most parts of south India. The Vijayanagara period was the golden age of the temple cars. Inscriptions of that age bear ample testimony to the flourishing conditions of the temples and rathams particularly the floating cars. Vijayanagara Emperors like Devaraya II(CE 1422-1466), Mallikarjuna (A.D.CE 1447-1465), Veera Narashima (CE 1505-1509), Krishna Deva Raya (CE 1509-1529), Achutha Raya (CE 1529-1542), Sadashiva (CE1542-1576), Tirumala (CE.1570-1572), Sriranga I (CE. 1572-1585) and Venkata I (CE. 1585-1614) gave significant grants for building magnificent temple cars. Local rulers like Rajanarayana Sambhuvaraya (CE. 1336-1372) of Kanchipuram, Sevappa Nayak (CE. 1530-1580) and Raghunatha Nayak (CE 1580-1600) of Thanjavur, Viswantha Nayak (CE.1529-1564), Krishnappa Nayak I (CE.1514-1572), Veerapa Nayak (CE. 1572-1575), Tirummalai Nayak (CE.1623-1659) and Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak (CE. 1706-1732) of Madurai followed the Vijayangara traditions in their patronage of temples. Krishnadeva Raya was an outstanding patron. He provided funds for the addition of temple cars at Palani, Alagar Koil, Tiruvarangulam, Aragalur, Nagapuram and Thiruvannamalai. Krishnadeva Raya is said to have undertaken religious tours throughout his kingdom and provided rich endowments to the noted shrines. What Krishnadeva Raya was to the Vijayanagar Empire, Tirumalai Nayak was to Madurai. Traditions connect him with temples of Tamilaham with one kind of benefaction or other. These kings concentrated more on the temple rathams, mandapas and teppakulams (tanks for the floating ratham) because there was scope for expansion and development in these areas only as all the other parts in the temple complex had been well developed by then. The spacious tanks called teppakulams were dug for the sole purpose of conducting the teppotsava (floating car festival). In addition to the above noted places which received the patronage of Krishnadeva Raya, a number of new places had acquired temple cars by this time. Tirupathi, Kanchipuram and Madurai became popular as centres of temple cars. Inscriptions of Tirumalai and Tirupathi bear witness to the growing number of festivals,

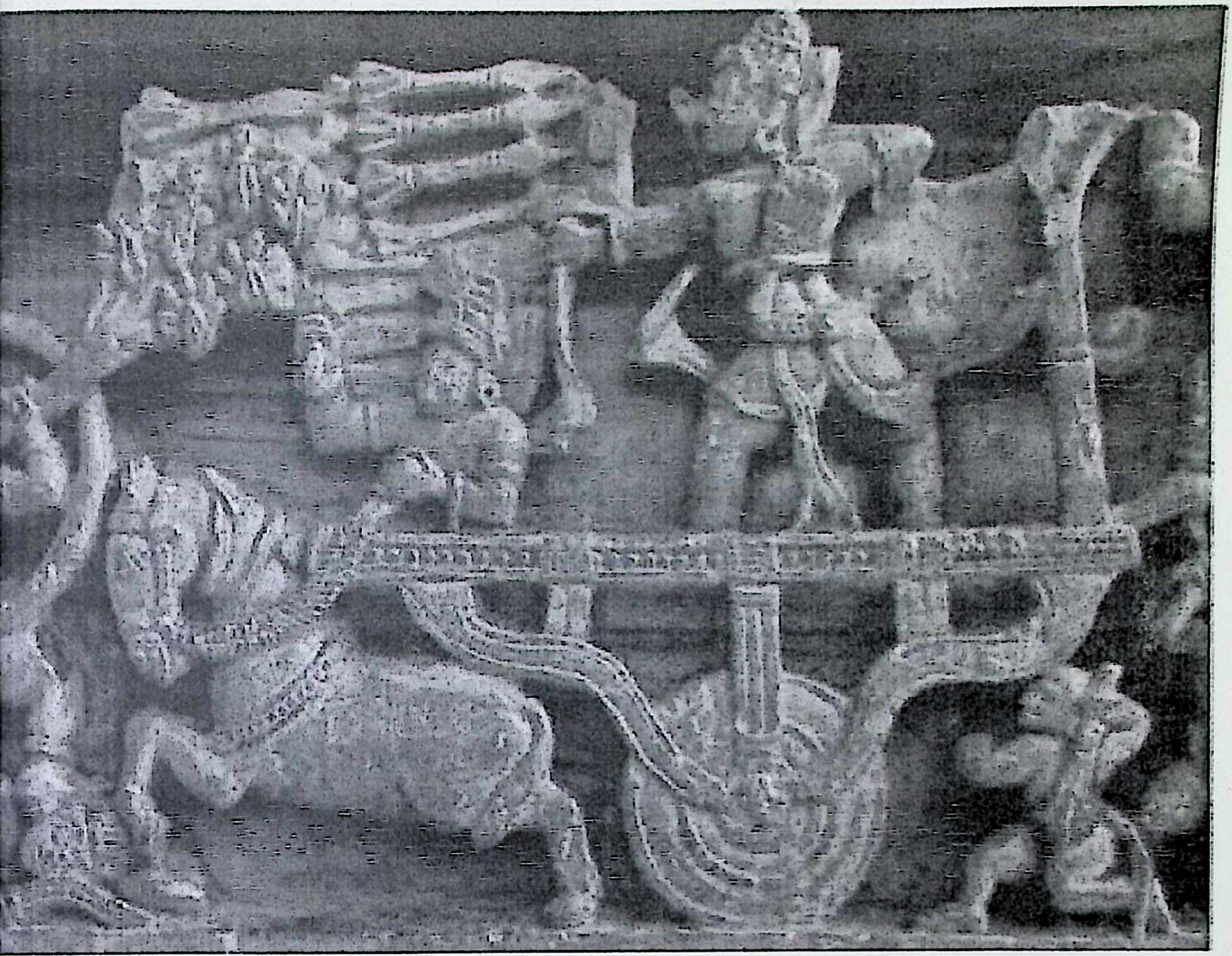


Panels from the temple of Halebeid in karnataka

The war between Ravana and Sri Rama.The single wheel of both the rathams with the monkeys attacking in front of Sri Rama's ratham and Ravana is shown to have many heads and arms .



A simple devaratham with a sarathi and a devata holding the bow and sending a row of arrows in a fight with the asuras from the temple of Halebeid



Heaven is too high for outstretched hands to seize.

A magnificient imagination of the artist showing the many wars between the devatas and asuras, the devata is just about to pull out an arrow and the sarathi holding the reins.

Sometimes with wrath and sometimes with sweet peace especially the details relating to the Brahmotsavas which were held for eleven, ten, eight, four or three days. Generally such a festival took place once in a year in a particular month. An inscription from the Varadarajaswami temple at Kanchipuram, dated in CE 1571 describes in detail the provisions for offering eatables like vadai, appam and idli to the God at the time of ratham festival. This inscription notes some of the parts of the ratham such as the palakani (Super structure), thiruther irumbu muttu (ratha-brakes made of iron), and vadam (rope). The same inscriptions provide for vadam pidika kuli (wages for holding the rope) and tachu Kuli (wages to carpenters). These carpenters were known as tiruppani pillai. At this time the city of Madurai was also growing in importance. It became the "city of festivals" as the result of the initiative taken by the Nayaks. Temple cars and teppakulams were added to most of the temples in and around Madurai. Outside Tamilaham temple cars were popular in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Odisha.

At the dawn of the 19th century CE the power of the Nayak's was dwindling rapidly and the English East India Company was gaining control over the land. Local powers such as the Nawab of Arcot, the Marawas of Ramanathapuram and Poligars of Tirunelveli added to the growing tension by making Tamilagam into a centre of political activity where least attention was given to temple administration.

The temple ratham had their origin in the pre-Pallava period as Cattather (simple single tier ratham without any carvings) and emerged as a full-fledged Vairather or Chittiramther (large multi-tiered ratham with hundreds of images) during the Pallava period. It was during the Chola period that these rathams established their strong hold in temple activities and its rituals. The temple ratham appears frequently in the inscriptions from the Chola period which proves that it had been developed into a well established institution requiring much finance for maintenance. It may be observed that the silver, golden and floating rathams came into use from the time of Sundara Pandya as noted in the Kovil Olugu. They were much popularised by the Vijayanagara kings and the Nayaks of Madurai, Thanjavur and Senji. The temple rathams, as it appears today, attained perfection during the Nayak period and spread rapidly into every nook and corner of southern India.

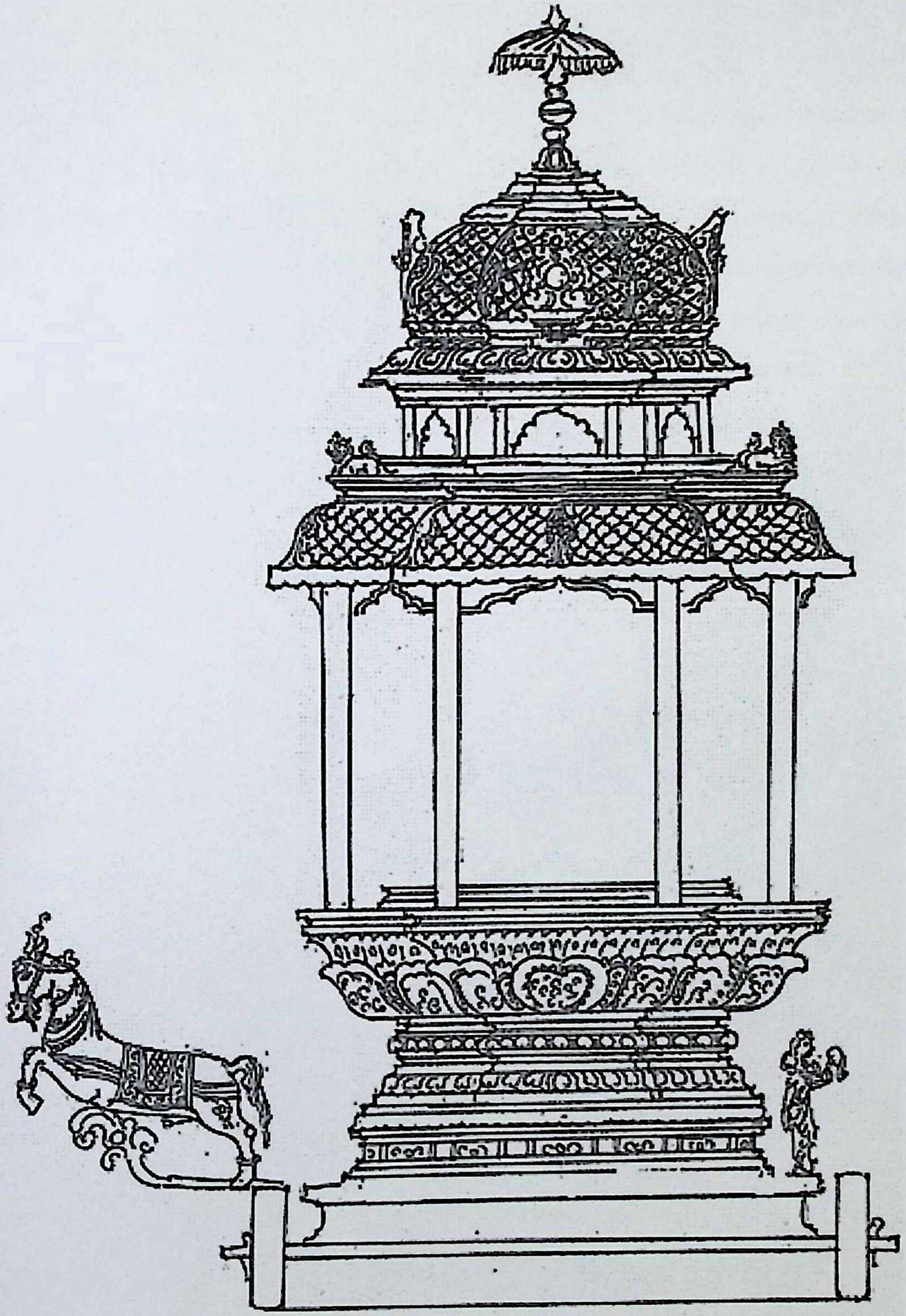
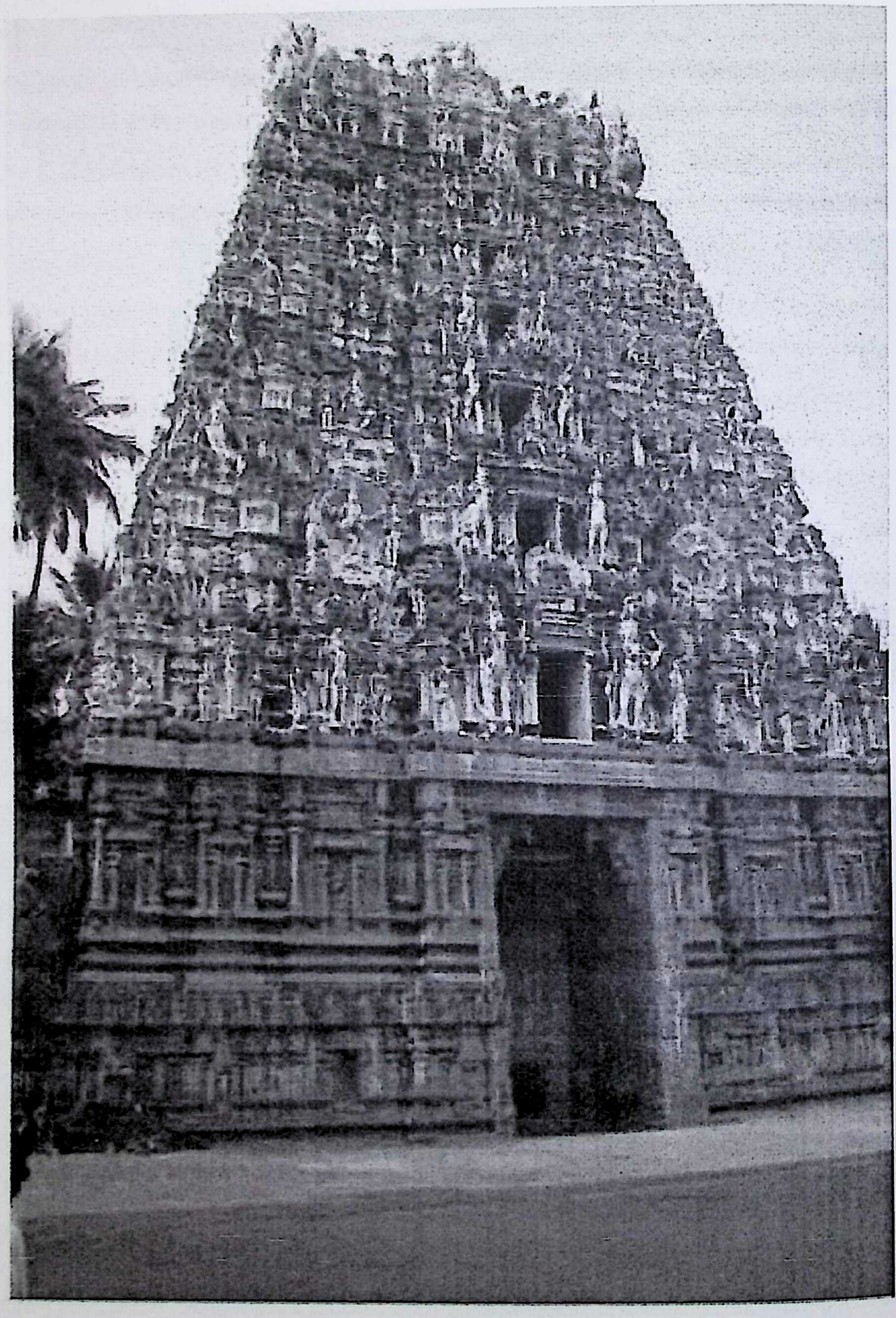


Figure 3

A devaratham , small in size, simple vimana, pada, chouli bearer and horse . A design for the silver and golden ratham



The gopuram of the Thirukameswar temple, Villianur, Pondicherry.

Chapter - II

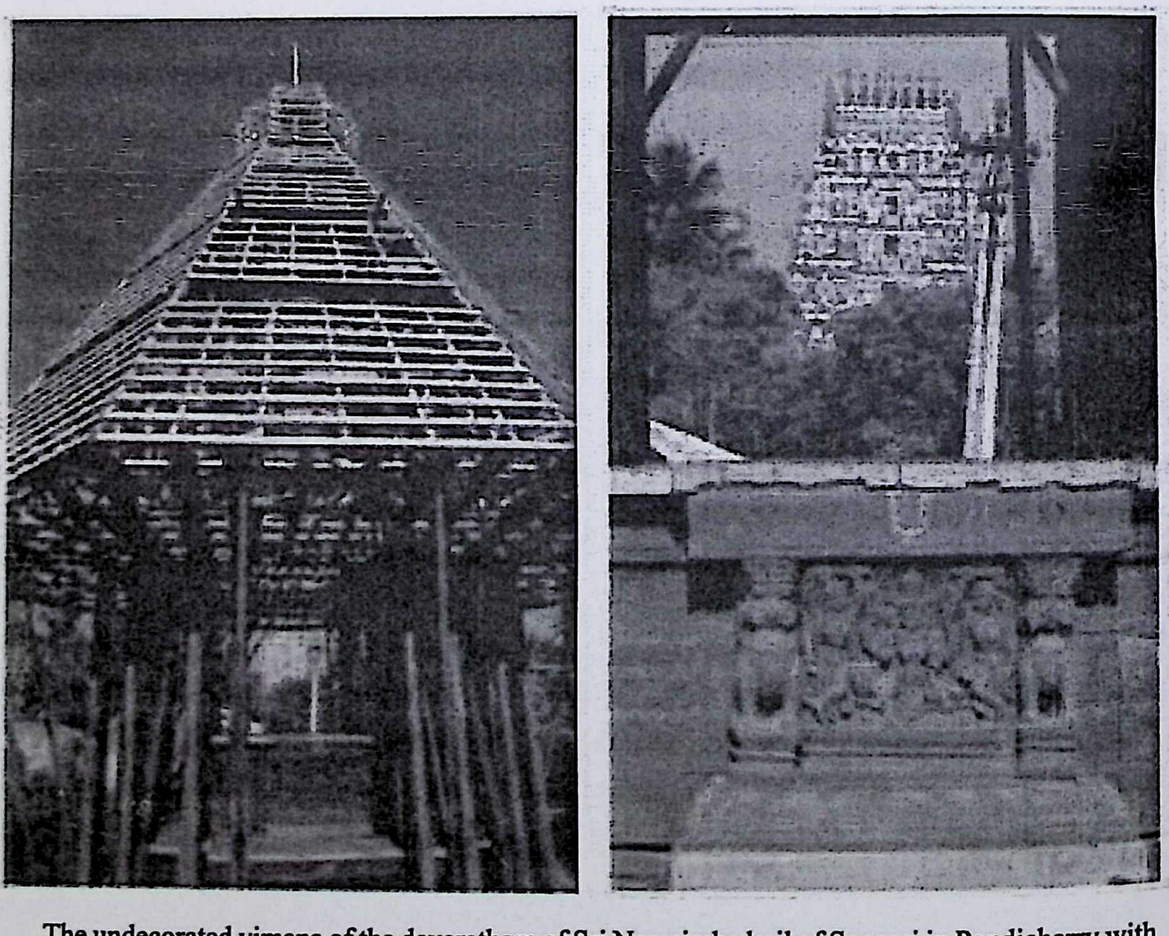
Devaratham and the temple

The temple forms a very important aspect of everyday life for Hindus. Most Hindus have an Istadeva or a family god whom they worship everyday. The villages are known as grama; thus each village has a principal deity called as grama devata. The female divinity or Shakti is more popular in majority of the villages and are known as grama Devi. Even today the concept is very much prevalent and the grama Devi is worshiped by all the villagers. The rituals observed are very simple and few paraphernalia are followed unlike in the well-developed stylized classical temples where elaborate customs and traditions described in the scriptures are strictly followed. An analogy may be done with the relationship of the folk dance and the classical dance. The folk dance follows a simple rhythm, music and folk songs. The classical dances are well developed with extensive literature describing the dance forms; various advanced rhythms, stylized costumes and codified presentations etc. Similarly the gramadevi in the villages have a simple place for worship, many a time just under a tree. While in the temple as it becomes bigger and larger they are decorated with highly stylized elaborate mandapas, several gopurams, prakharas, vahanas etc. Similarly the devarathams may be very simple Cattather with little or no decorations while the larger rathams are multistoried with hundreds of exquisitely carved out images and highly stylized and have elaborate paraphernalia associated with them.

Most of the Hindu temples are dedicated to one principle deity, usually Shiva, Vishnu or Shakti. There may be many smaller temples of other gods and goddesses in the temple complex. Man is a social being and lives with a family, with children, relatives and sometimes even friends. The same concept is extended to the gods and goddesses, while the principal deity occupies the primary position in the temple complex, the consort and children are placed nearby and sometimes friends are also present. So we have Shiva along with Amman, Murugan and Vinayaga invariably present in all Shiva temples. The parasa devata are the gods who reside in the close vicinity of the main deity and usually on the outer walls of the temple. The same concept is very much present in the rathams.

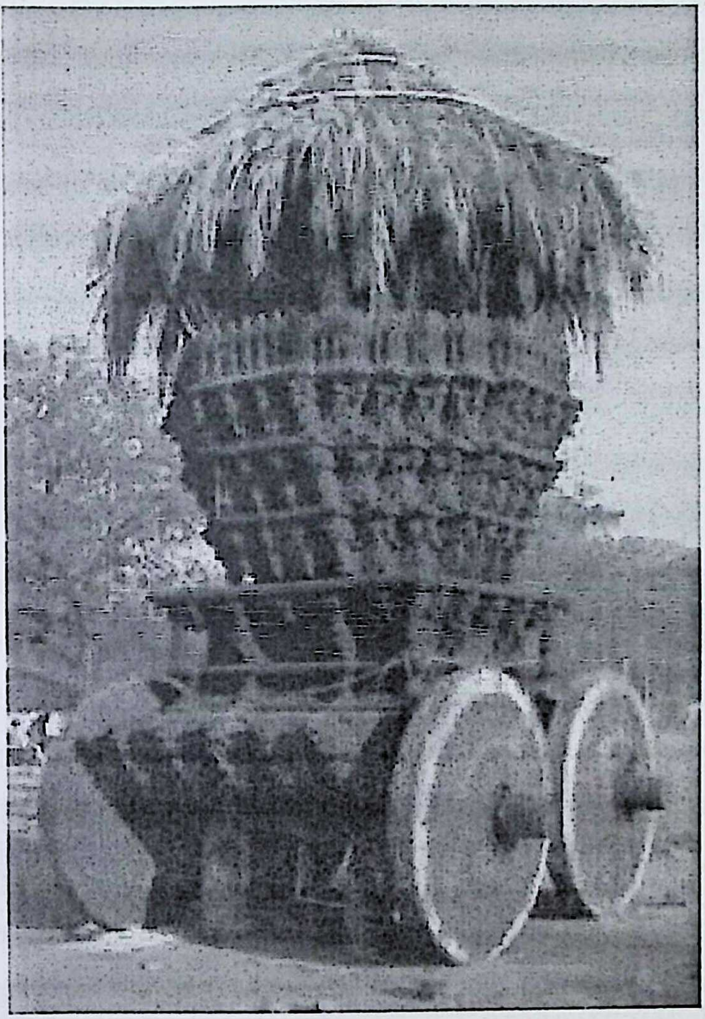
The Hindu gods or goddesses represent the whole cosmos. The devaratham is a complete replica of the temple in all its aspects or elements including the presiding deity. It represents all the facets of the temple from the gross to the spiritual. In fact during the time of the festival of Ratha-uthsava when the Lord is placed on the ratham, all the rituals done inside the temple is conducted on the ratham. The concept too goes further in "Puri" Rathayatra – it is Lord Jaganath, the principle deity and not his utshava murti that is placed on the ratham. Further there is no other pooja conducted inside the temple as it performed on the ratham.

The ratham along with the lord or deity moves during the rathayatra, hence it is called as the moving temple (unlike the temple which is standing). But there are some temples which are built like a ratham with stone wheels, like the Konark temple and the beautiful stone ratham at Vitthala temple in Hampi, both are immovable.



The undecorated vimana of the devaratham of Sri Narasimha koil of Sengeri in Pondicherry with the temple on the background, on the right is closeup view of the left side, Lakshmi below the devasana.

The garbagriha is the sanctum-sanctum of the temple forms the most auspicious place of the temple as the main deity is installed here. It is usually square shaped with the opening on the east side and deity facing east.



The undecorated devaratham at Banasankari in Karnataka with the vimana covered by palm leaves.

The lord is seated on the Simhasana or a raised pedestal. Sometimes this pedestal is multiple tiered with carvings on it. Otherwise the garbagriha is usually free from any sculptures. The sanctum - sanctum opens to the outside by a narrow passage called the "Antarala". In front of it is the "Mookha Mandapa" or the front hall, it is the hall for the devotees to have darshan of the lord. This hall is usually connected to an even larger hall called the "Maha mandapa". This is a bigger hall hence it is called Maha mandapa. The shrine of the consort of the main deity is usually located in the north side of the "Maha mandapa". It is Lakshmi in case of Vishnu temple and Amman or Parvati in case of Shiva temple.

The Maha mandapa is also connected to the subsidiary halls on either side. The Natamandapa is the dancing hall where music recitals and dance performances in praise of the lord is offered. The Bhoga-mandapa is the dining hall where the devotees are served with the Prasad or food offered and consecrated to the lord. Some of the larger temple complexes have also a "Kalyana-mandapa" – the hall where marriages are conducted. In temples where there are a large number of Vahanas, a separate hall is made to house them and is called as "Vahana-mandapa".

In front of the Maha-mandapa is the place for the Vahana of the principal deity; like Nandi in Shiva temple and Garuda in a Vishnu temple. The "Balipitha" or sacrificial pit is in front of the Vahana where the sacrificial fire is lit and homa is conducted.

The Dhwaja is the flag of the temple and it is hoisted on the pillar called Dhwaja sthamba. Some of the temples in the eastern and central India have the flag on the temple Sikhara or filial. Similarly a flag is hoisted on the top of the ratham during the festival. There is a direct relationship between the main door of the sanctum sanctum and the height and distance of the flag staff or Dhwaja sthamba, the height of the door forming one unit of measurement. The distance from the door should be four, five or six units away. Similarly the height of the flag staff is usually 12 units but can be 10, 15, 17 or 20 times of this unit. Either way the maximum height of the flagstaff should not go beyond 72 feet. The flag staff has three parts as Brahma bhagam, Vishnu bhagam and Roudra bhagam. The portion below the ground is square shaped and is the Brahma bhagam. The part just above it is the Vishnu bhagam and is usually octagonal and the upper part is round in shape and is called as Roudra bhagam. The flag staff is usually made up of single piece of teak wood; sometime it is made up of granite. The surface is usually covered with sheets of copper, and sometimes with silver or gold. In the Vishnu bhagam we always see beautiful carvings of the various manifestations of the main deity of that particular temple. It also shows engravings about the lord, as in the Shiva temple at Bahoor – Vinayaga, Karthikeya, Lingodhbhava and Shiva – Parvati Brishava-vahana are shown on the four sides of the Dhwaja sthamba. In front of the flag staff is the Balipeetham. A very similar description about the Dhwaja and Dhwaja sthamba is found in the Shilparatnam.

The main vahana like the Nandi for Shiva and Garuda for Lord Vishnu (Perumal) is located just in front of the Dhwaja sthamba. These are surrounded by walls and one can go around the temple in a pradakshina. Each of these walls will have an entrance in the four cardinal directions. The space between the two pradaskhina walls around the temple is called as prakhara. A gopuram is always present above the eastern gate or dwara; additional gopurams may be present in the various prakaharas in all the cardinal directions. In addition to the gopurams and mandapas the temple has its own treasury, pakasala (kitchen), vgrana (store), puskarani (tank), flower garden or pushpa vatika and the ratham.

The first prakhara around the main deity is called as Antara mandala. The second prakhara is called as Madhyashara mandala, the outermost prakhara is Bhayahara mandala. The last enclosure is called as Maryada or last wall.

There may be several other shrines in the temple complex outside the main temple. These include temple for Vinayaga and Murugan in almost all Shiva temples. Similarly Vishnu as Seshasayi, Lakshmi – Narayana, Narashima, Ramar and shrine for Hanuman are seen in the Perumal temples.

The above description is a very simple and concise view of the basic arrangement of the traditional typical Hindu temple. The vertical arrangement around the principal deity in the temple has more similarity with the arrangement of the different components of the ratham.

The main deity is usually seated on the raised platform or pedestal called the "Simhasana". Sometimes this is a two tiered structure with very tiny figures on them, otherwise the sanctum – sanctum is bare of any decorative structure. At the same time the outer wall around the sanctum - sanctum (the vertically straight portion) is decorated with beautiful idols made from stone. They always depict stories related to the main deity either from the Puranas, epics or other stories. In Perumal (Vishnu) temples stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Dasavatar are very popular. Shiva temples have his many forms like Gangadhara-murthi, Nataraja, and Dhakshinamurti. Some temples have inscriptions describing the donors of the temple. In some of the temples we have inscriptions describing the sastras.

The outer wall around the main sanctum is vertically straight up to a particular height and then slowly tapers and narrows down from all sides. It end up in the griva or gala or the neck of the temple, to expand again a little bit to bear the Kalasam. Above the Kalasam is the flag post with the flag known as Dhwaja on the Dhwaja sthamba, this portion is called as the filial or most important crowing part or shikhara. This entire structure or portion above the sanctum sanctum is known as the Vimana of the temple. A view of the shikhara from far off is itself an

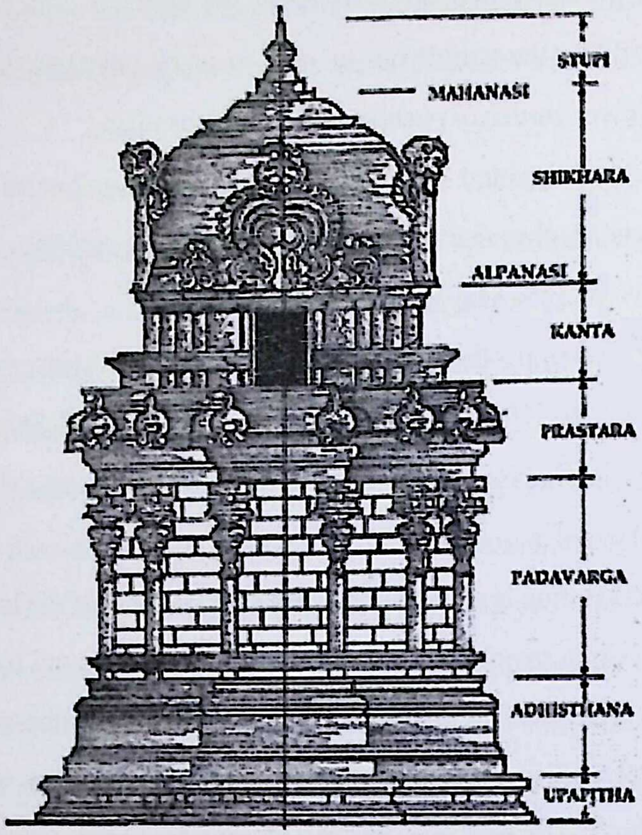
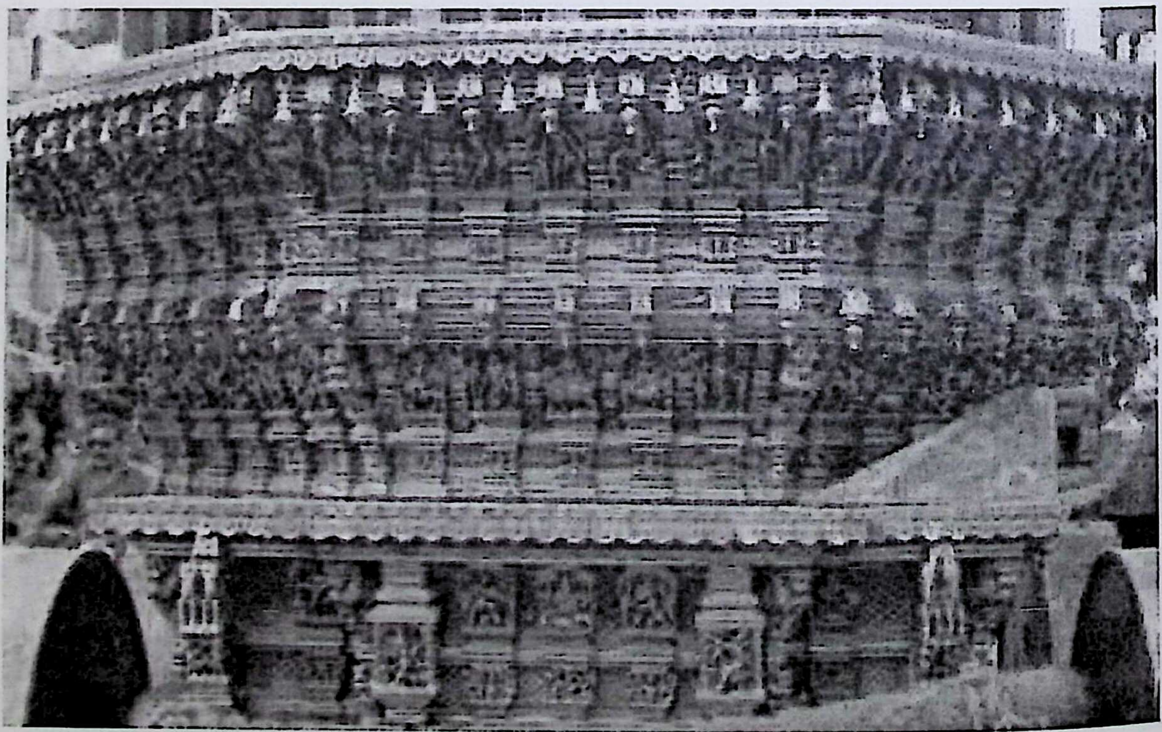

STUPI
MAHANASI
SHIKHARA
ALPANASI
KANTA
PRASTARA
PADAVARGA
ADHISTHANA
UPAPITHA

Figure 4
An Indian temple vertical section with all the elements



auspicious event for the devotee; it is equivalent to a visit to the temple. Hence a darsan of the shikhara is enough even if one is unable to make a pilgrimage to the main temple. Th narrowing up can be of various shapes depending on the era the temple has been built and its location. In Orissa and Madyapradesh they are mostly circular in nature while in South India they are rectangular in shape.

The devaratham is in many ways a replica of the Devalaya or Mandira or temple. Hence there is a very striking similarity between the arrangement of the elements in the ratham and that of the elements in the temple. The Vastupurusha mandala of the temple has two main parts, the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal part forms the ground plan and deals in great detail with the arrangements of the garbha griha or the Brahmasthana, the deva and devis (gods and goddesses) and the mandapas. The vertical arrangements consist of the Vimana forming the structure above the Garbha-griha (sanctum-sanctum) as well as the various prakaharas and the gopurams of the temple complex. All these elements are closely linked with the arrangements of the elements seen on the ratham. The vertical elevation of the garbha griha of the moolasthana is divided into following parts from below upwards Upapitha, Adhisthana, Pada or Padavarga, Prasthara, Kantha, Shikhara and Stupa. The height of the temple is in a fixed multiple of the height of the Moolavar or main deity. The same principle is used for the ratham; the height of the ratham is in a fixed multiple of the height of the uthsava murti. The height of the uthsava murti is also in a fixed ratio or proportion of that of the main deity. Similar to the temple the ratham has an Upapitha, Adhisthana, Pada, Vimana, Sikhara and the Stupa.

Temple	**Devaratham**
Upapitha	Upapitha
Adhisthana	Adhisthana
Pada (Padavarga)	Pada
Prasthana	Devasana & Simhasana
Kantha	Vimana
Sikhara	Sikhara
Stupa	Stupa
Dwaja	Dwaja

This proportional system is also followed in the construction of the ratham. The line drawn from the point between the eyebrows of the main deity in the sanctum-sanctum to the tip of the Dhwaja-sthamba makes 22 ½ degree and further extended it reaches the tip of the Kalasam on the gopuram in front of the flag staff. The principle followed is that the earth is at the same angle (22 ½ degree) towards the sun. Thus the distance and height of the gopuram and the Dhwaja-sthamba are related to the height of the main Murti inside the sanctum-sanctum which has a relation to the position of earth, thus they are in rhythm with the cosmos. All the measurements of the ratham including its height, width, size and thickness of the wheel, the various layers like the Upapitha, Pada, Simhasana , Vimana etc are linked with the uthsava moorti and thus to that of the main deity and so are in perfect rhythm with the cosmos. The stability of the ratham structure is to be attributed to the principle of unity, balance, distribution of weight, and proportional system followed as in the scriptures. It provides both static and dynamic stability. All the elements of the ratham are interlinked to hold in position the ratham while stationary or while moving during the rathayatra and ratha utshava. In additions to rings and nails, square shaped iron rods are places strategically passing through from the platform to the base of the ratham to prevent the components of the ratham from disengaging during movement. There are many mortise and tenon joints between the components of the ratham to ensure additional strength. The panels have holes or slots cut into each section which fits into the next section. There is just enough space between the panels and other parts to allow minimum movement and expansion due to wear and tear and from exposure to moisture, sunlight. This ensures that the panels and other components do not break during the movement of the ratham during the rathayatra.

The horizontal arrangement of the pavilions or various mandapas in the temple complex is described here. The centre or heart is the sanctum-sanctum or the garbha griha, where in resides the Moolavar or the main deity. The garbha griha is connected to the rest of the complex by a narrow passage called as Antarala. It is sometimes also called as sukhanasi or sukanasa or ardhamandapa. It connects to the Mookha mandapa or the larger hall. The anatarala has a set of dwarapala or dwarapalika on either sides of the doorway with or without additional divinities. The gateway may be elaborately decorated in some places. In some places the mookha mandapa may be integrated with the antarala, and then one can find a place for the consort of the lord on the northern side. The mookha mandapa means the pavilion facing the lord; it is connected to a very large mandapa called the Mahamandapa, which can hold a large gathering of devotees. In addition a Natamandapa or Nirttamandapa or Navaranga is attached for the devotees to sing, dance, recite from the scriptures, conduct spiritual discourses etc. This hall has many pillars with decorative and dancing postures and mural paintings, musical pillars, etc. Similarly some of the large temple complexes will have a vahana mandapa to keep the vahanas; some have a mandapa to conduct marriages called as Kalyana mandapa, and some may have the Astana mandapa for holding court by the lord. There is an Alankara mandapa which is the hall where the lord is decorated with precious jewels, ornaments; the uthsava mandapa is the hall where various festivals are conducted. Most of the temple complexes also have large water body or tank to celebrate the Vasanta uthsava which is called as Vasanta mandapa or tapa (in Tamil), here the lord is taken out floating on a raft or boat decorated with oil lamps. Beyond the mandapas in front of the flag post is the Deepa sthamba to hold the oil lamps in front the Dhwaja sthamba. Baalipitha and just beyond it and used as an alter for conducting sacrifices to the main deity, mostly small animals in some of the Shakti peetams like Chandi and Mahakali, otherwise mostly large pumpkins white gourd is used as a sacrifice.

Dik Pallikas

Besides the four cardinal directions as east, west, north and south, there are four more directions in between them as south-east, south-west, north-east and north-west. Each of these directions has a god called as Dikpala or Ashta dikpalikas. They are the following

East	Indra
South-east	Agni
South	Yama
South-west	Niririti
West	Varuna
North-west	Vayu
North	Kubera
North east	Isana

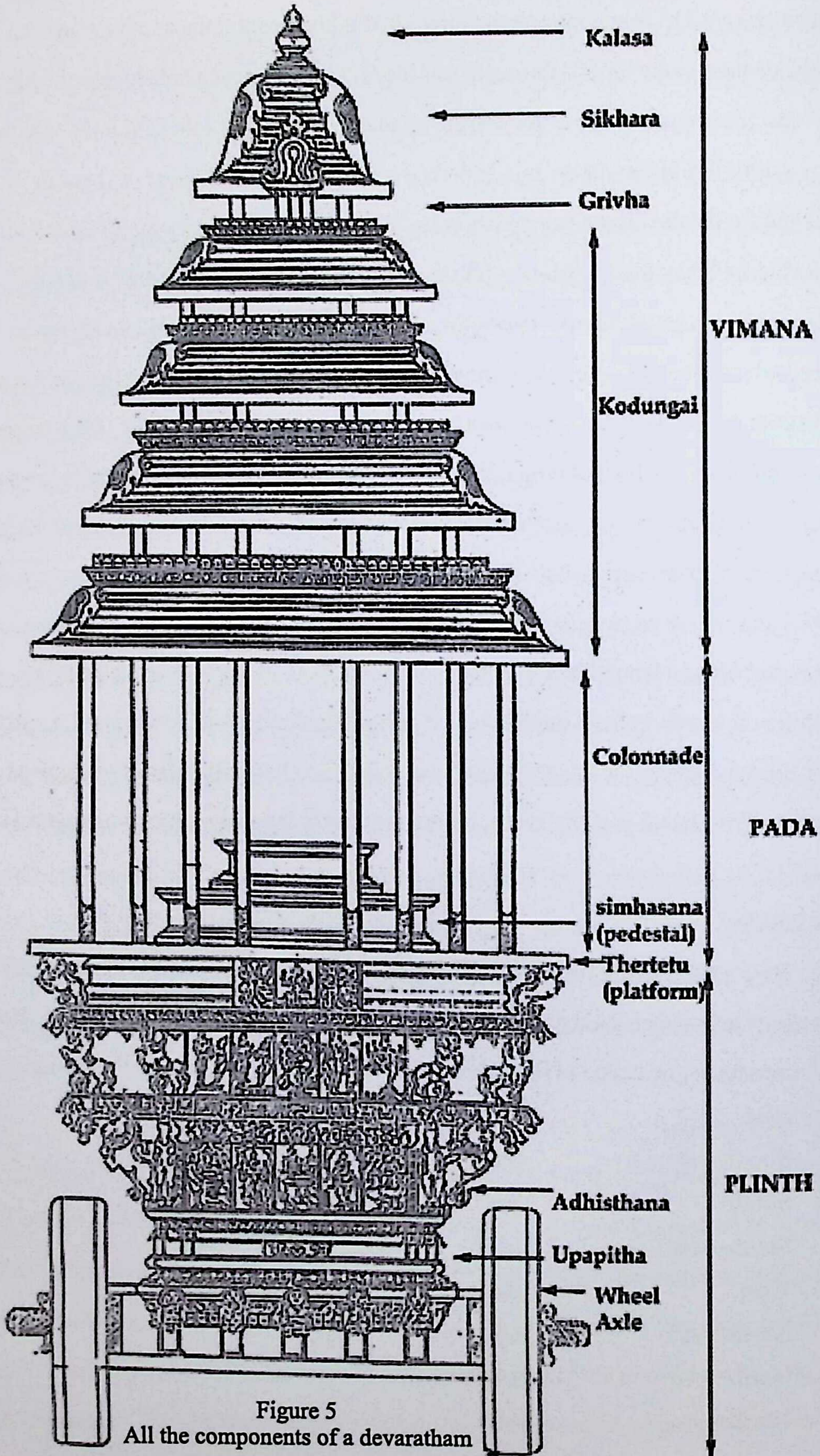

Kalasa
Sikhara
Grivha
Kodungai
VIMANA
Colonnade
PADA
simhasana (pedestal)
Thertelu (platform)
PLINTH
Adhisthana
Upapitha
Wheel
Axle

Figure 5
All the components of a devaratham

The images of these eight gods are usually placed in the eight directions on the ratham. In the Bhootasahkya the directions or dik (diga) are ten. In addition to the above mentioned eight directions one above and below the horizontal plane also exists. Sage Aryabhatta says that there are only three directions, one horizontal; the others are upwards and downwards, tiryak, upar and adhah.

There are eight divine elephants for the eight directional gods known as Ashta Diggajas, and they are Airavatam, Pundareekam, Vamanam, Kumudan, Anjanam, Pushpadantam, Sarvabhowman and Suprateekan. Each of these Diggajas has a female companion namely Abhirami, Kapila, Pingla, Anupama, Tamarakani, Subradanti, Angana and Anjanavati respectively. The eight directions also have eight heavenly bodies associated with them.

They are

East	Surya (Sun)
South east	Sukra (Venus)
South	Kujan (Mars)
South west	Rahu
West	Manda (Saturn)
North West	Chandra (Moon)
North	Buddha (Mercury)
North east	Guru (Jupiter)

It is said that if one worships the Dikpala and the divine elephants which are present on the ratham during the Brahma-ustava and the rathayatra the devotee is bestowed with wealth, health and peace.

The vertical design of the temple ratham is very much like that of the temple. The ratham has got a base placed on the axles connecting the wheels and cross linked by wooden logs. The ratham is divided into the Plinth, Pada and Vimana from below to top respectively. The Simhasana of the deity is placed on a single or double tiered pedestal in the centre of the platform.

A typical temple ratham from south India is shaped just like a temple. It has got an average of two to six wheels. The wheels are connected by an axle. A strong base of the temple ratham is made up by the wooden blocks placed on the axles. On the above base we have wooden blocks placed vertically straight and are also interconnected to provide good strength and stability, this portion of the ratham is known as the "Upapitha". The entire weight of the temple ratham is passed on to the wheel through the base.

The next part is the "Adhisthana", which is formed by the horizontal and vertical bars of wood expanding outwards from below upwards. It reaches the height of the wheels and stops exactly at the level of the edge of the wheels, sometimes rarely expands little more outwards. The surface is covered by single or multiple tiers, with sculptures of gods, goddess, yali, dancers, animals, etc. No space is to be left empty, so even the niches are filled with smaller figures. The underlying frame work is never visible from outside, even the tips of the logs criss-crossing is covered with floral, ornamental patterns or carved with miniature figures

The "Narasana" forms the next part extending vertically straight upwards to from the Adhisthana to end on the horizontal platform called as "tertattu" (in Tamil).

On the centre of this tertattu or the main platform is the pedestal – a small raised platform which is either single or two tiered. On this pedestal the lord is placed on his "Simhasana". On the Shimhasana sits the Pratima-murti or utshavamurti of the deity of the temple. Utshavamurti is usually made of brass, silver or gold and is a replica of the deity placed inside the temple. The pedestal of the lord has usually the images of "Ashtalakshmi" (eight aspects of Lakshmi) irrespective of the deity to whom the ratham is dedicated, be it Shiva, Vishnu, Amman or Ganapathy. The more common among them is Santana Lakshmi, Gaja Lakshmi, Dhanya Lakshmi and Danalaksmi.

The pedestal is surrounded by columns of wooden blocks (minimum 32 and maximum 80 in numbers) firmly attached to the platform. They support the Vimana above. The portion from the platform to the beginning of the Vimanam is called the "Pada". The Vimana starts at the end of the Pada and extends upwards and narrows from all sides towards the tip. It is made up of wooden strips cross linked to form a single unit and the weight is passed on to the platform through the vertical wooden blocks. The Vimana is usually bare and they are covered with decorative coloured appliqué cloths only during the time of the festival. This cloth has images with stories related to the deity on the ratham. In Perumal koil temple ratham, it depicts stories from Ramayana and Dasa-avatar etc. The upper part of the Vimana ends in a short vertical narrow part called "Griva", then is the tapering "Shikhara" on which the "Kalasam" is placed. On top of the Kalasam is the flag post or Dhwaja-sthamba with the flag or Dhwaja of the lord of the temple. The Kalasam and Dhwaja-sthamba along with the dhwaja is placed only on the day of the festival and removed for safe keeping at the end of the ratha-uthsava. This brief description comparing the temple ratham with the temple proves that the ratham becomes the moving temple during the rathayatra in all aspects ritualistically and structurally.

The ratham and the Gopuram

The gopuram is the entrance of the temple and a towering structure. It forms part of the south Indian temple complex and has been integrated with the temple from the 12th century CE. There is a very significant relation between the temple gopuram and the devaratham. The gopuram is rectangular in its base and tapers upwards to end in the filial with the Kalasa. In the era prior to the twelfth century most of the temples entrance had a huge door with a flat top, all made up of granite stone. The super structure above the door way has given rise to the gopuram at a later date and hence most of them are made up of brick and plaster (lime).

TEMPLE AS THE BODY OF THE DEITY

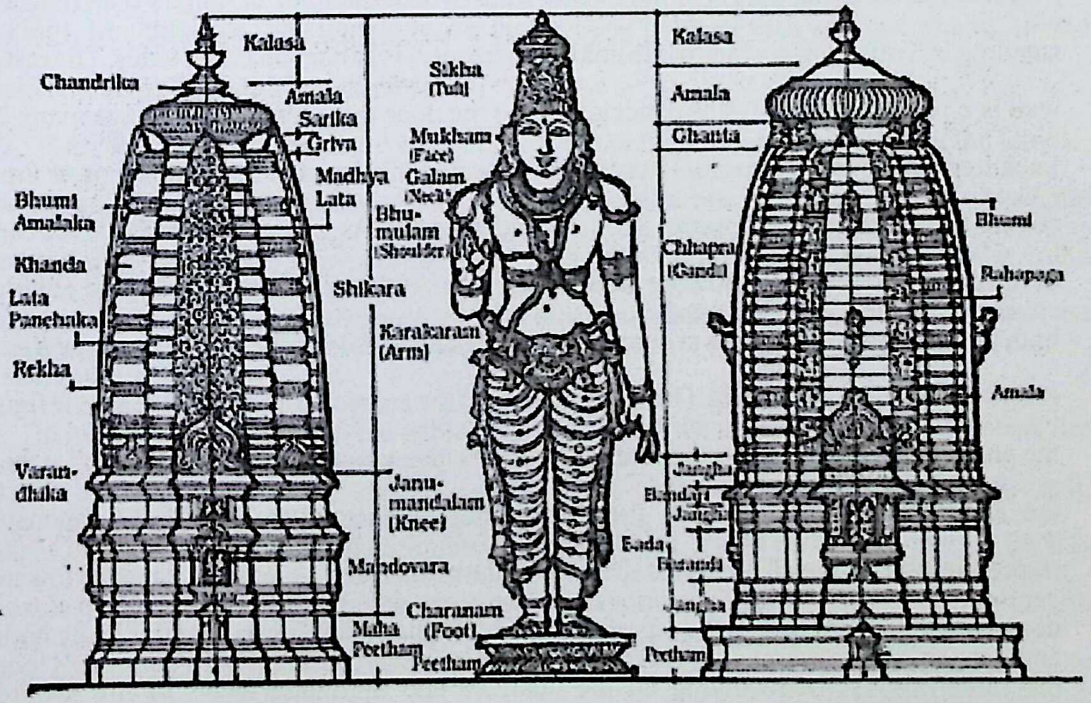

Kalasa
Chandrika
Amala
Sarika
Griva
Madhya Lata
Bhumi Amalaka
Khanda
Lata Panchaka
Rekha
Varandhika
Shikara
Mandovara
Maha Peetham
Sikha (Tuft)
Mukham (Face)
Galam (Neck)
Bhumulam (Shoulder)
Karakaram (Arm)
Janumandalam (Knee)
Charanam (Foot)
Peetham
Kalasa
Amala
Ghanta
Chhapra (Gandi)
Bhumi
Rahapaga
Amala
Jangha
Bandana
Jangha
Bada
Pabhaga
Jangha
Peetham
NAGARA VIMANAM
THE DEITY
KALINGA VIMANAM

Figure 6

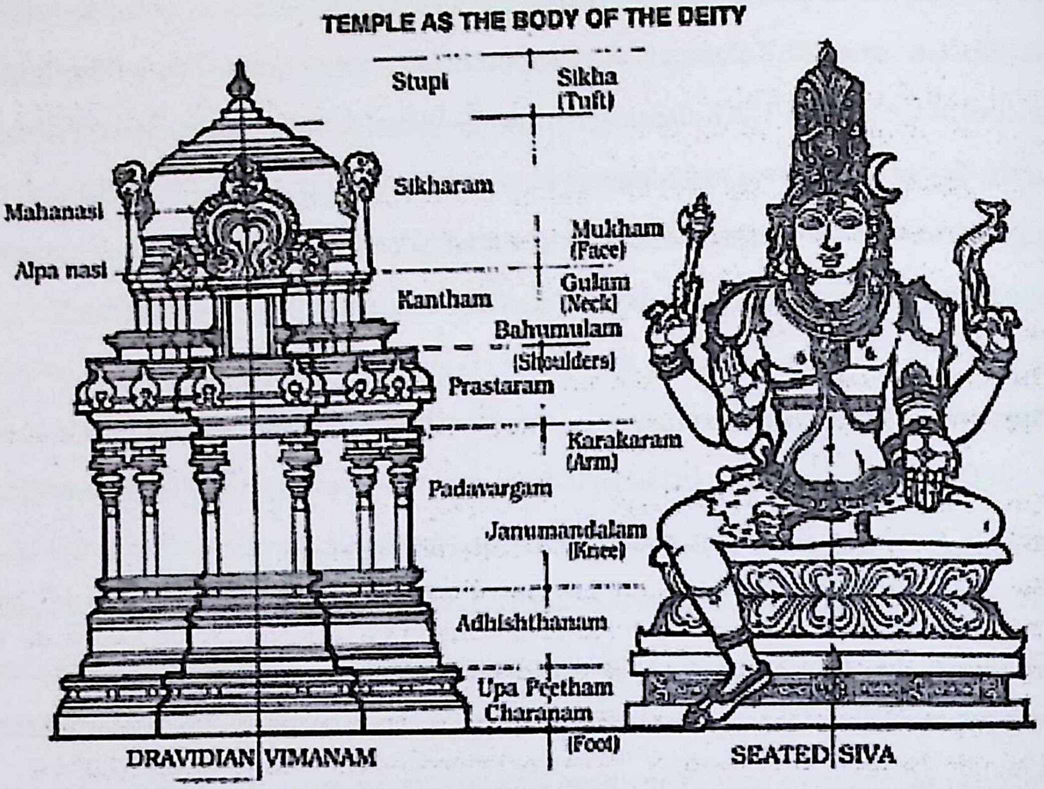

TEMPLE AS THE BODY OF THE DEITY
Stupi
Sikha (Tuft)
Sikharam
Mahanasi
Alpa nasi
Mukham (Face)
Kantham
Gulam (Neck)
Bahumulam (Shoulders)
Prastaram
Karakaram (Arm)
Padavargam
Janumandalam (Knee)
Adhishthanam
Upa Peetham
Charanam (Foot)
DRAVIDIAN VIMANAM
SEATED SIVA

Figure 7

On the gopuram just besides the door on the outer and inner wall are the Dwarapala or dwarapalika on either side. On the lateral walls where the door is hinged dalamalika (lady standing in Tribhanga posture while holding a creeper) is carved on either sides. The rest of the wall is covered by carvings of dancers. Above the door the gopuram may have many tiered. Each tier will have a door with Dwarapala or dwarapalika next to it, while the other areas are covered with many gods, apsaras, animal, goddesses, etc. As we look upwards we see carvings of the demi-gods, figures showing human activities. At the upper most part of the gopuram on both the sides giant yali faces are carved out and painted colorfully. At the top is the filial with Kalasa ending in a pointed tip. One can understand the nearest to us at the base are the figures of the gods and as we move upwards it ends with the elements and finally in a "Bindu" at the tip of the Kalasa. In the devaratham the presentation is just reverse with the panchabhoota (representing the five elements) at the base of the ratham and as it raises it moves towards the devatas and goddess and on the top of the vimana we have the Kalasa. Symbolically both have the same purpose of resolving all the dualities and multitude facets of life towards the indefinable point "The Divine". The Gopurams are symbolic of liberation from the bondage of matter as one enters the temple and proceeds toward the Divine at the centre. Symbolically, the Gopuram represents the feet of the deity. A devotee bows at the feet of the Lord at the entrance as he steps into the temple and proceeds towards the sanctum, leaving behind the world of contradictions. In concept, the crest of the Gopuram has the same significance of representing the central Brahmasthana. One of the most important rituals is the consecration of the temple, during which the sacred holy water is always poured on the top of the Kalasa of the gopuram as well as the Kalasa on top of the vimana over the sanctum-sanctum simultaneously. This is also done during the 'khumbhabhisekam' of the temples in south India. Only the darsan of the gopuram from a far distance is enough to purify the being of all the impurities and considered equal to the darsan of the lord inside the temple. Similarly the darsan Vimana of the devaratham from far during the festival is considered to be equal to the darsan of the Lord and gives salvation or moksha to the devotee.

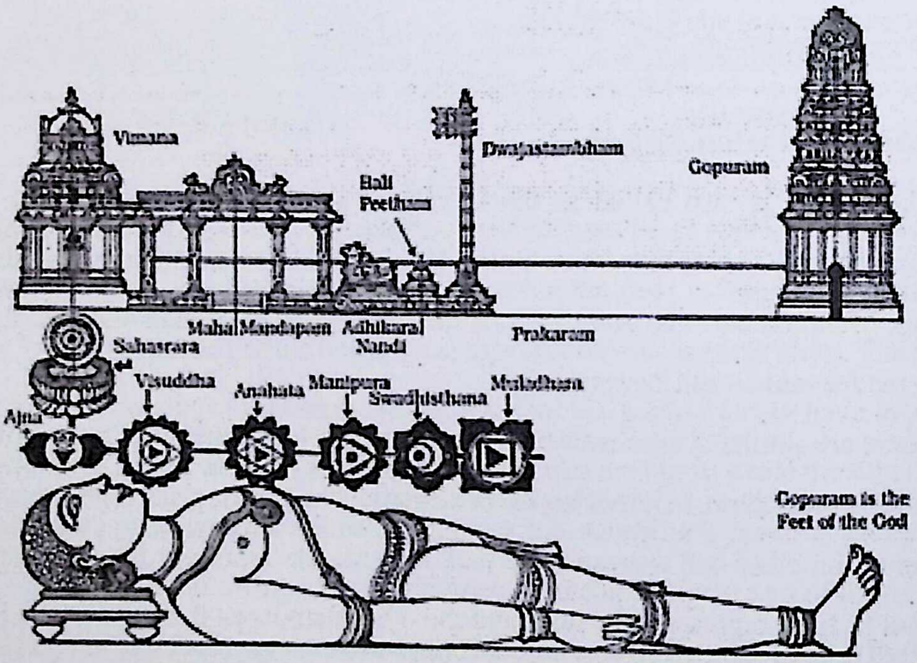
The ratham and the human body

The temple is also called as the Devalaya, which means the home of the devata; devaprasada which means the palace for the devata (similar to the rajaprasada – the palace for the king), Mandira, etc. The temple forms the meeting point of man and god, the finite and infinite, the Jeevatman and Paramatman.

There are similar symbolisms both in vertical and horizontal architecture of the temple, gopuram and the ratham. In its horizontal presentation the garbha griha represents the head, the gopuram at the other end represent the feet, the antarala represent the neck, and the ardha mandapas in front represents the nose and the other mandapas the parts of the body and the prakharas the hands.

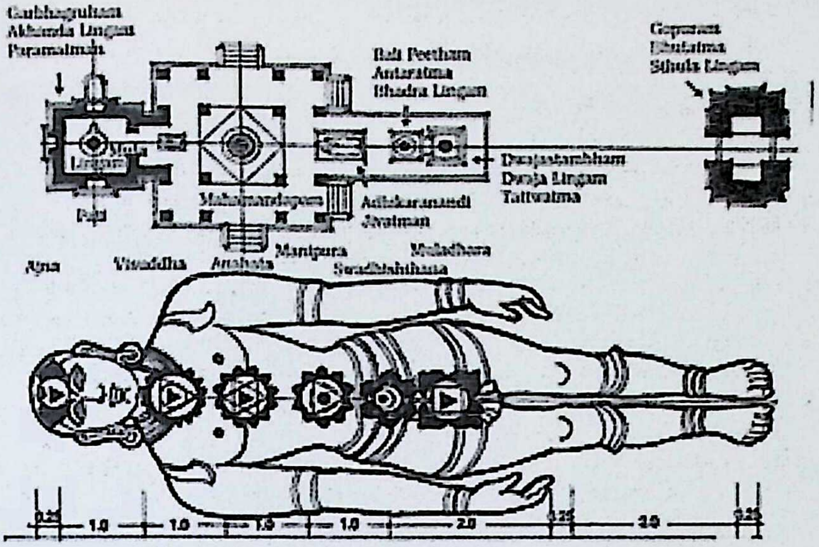
In its vertical presentation the garba griha represents the neck, the Sikhara the head, the Kalasam on the Sikhara the hair on the head and so on. There are three major paths leading to Moksha or liberation in the Hindu religion. They are bhakti, gyana and karma marga. Each is not exclusive of the others. Bhakti bhava or intense devotion to the lord leads to the realization of god. Nama jaapa, the repeated recitation of the lord's name is one form of devotion leading to Moksha. Gyana marga is the path of true knowledge leading to Moksha. Karma yoga is by offering all the work done leading to god realization. Each path is inclusive of the others, hence bhakti leads to gyana and karma, gyana leads to bhakti and karma, karma leads to gyana and bhakti as well. God realization is true devotion, true knowledge and work becoming an offering at the feet of the lord. The lord is seated in the heart center, so one tries to find god through the heart by devotion. The other is by true knowledge or gyana marga, the path of knowledge in which case it is through the head which is the center of knowledge that one can reach god. In karma yoga one has to offer all works at the feet of the lord for god realization. In another analogy the three major components of our being, the physical(body-Sarira), vital (life forces-Prana) and the mental(mind-manna) is represented by the three paths karma yoga, bhakti yoga and gyana yoga respectively.

The ratham also follows a similar analogy in the arrangement of the elements with the uthsava murti being placed in the center or the heart centre, the wheels forming the limbs, the Kalasa atop the Vimana forming the head etc. The deva ratham's Simhasana or Brahmasthana seats the uthsava murti representing the Bindu, Soul, Paramatman, outpouring and ever-expanding. All forms and imagery of time, space, form and energy is the expression of That alone. As in the temple garbha griha so also the uthsava murti seated on the simhasana of the


Vimana
Dwajastambham
Gopuram
Bali Peetham
Maha Mandapam
Adhikaral Nandi
Prakaram
Sahasrara
Visuddha
Anahata
Manipura
Swadhisthana
Muladhara
Ajna
Gopuram is the Feet of the God

ELEVATION OF THE TEMPLE AND GOD IN LYING POSTURE

Figure 8

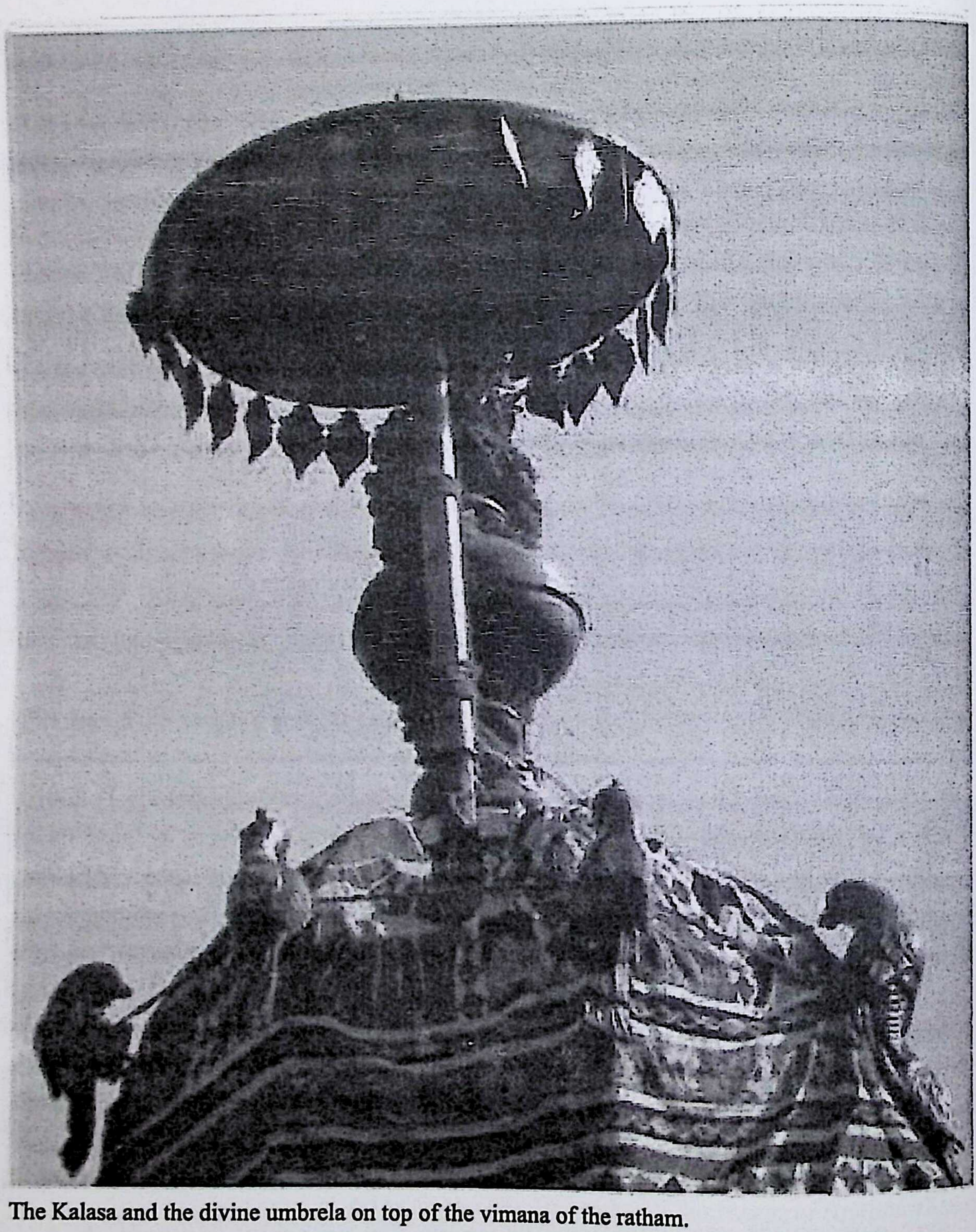

Garbhagruham
Akhanda Lingam
Paramatman
Mula Lingam
Pada
Mahamandapam
Bali Peetham
Antaratma
Bhadra Lingam
Adhikaranandi
Jivatman
Dwajastambham
Dwaja Lingam
Tattwatma
Gopuram
Bhutatma
Sthula Lingam
Ajna
Visuddha
Anahata
Manipura
Swadhishthana
Muladhara
0.25
1.0
1.0
1.0
1.0
2.0
0.25
2.0
0.25

PLAN OF THE TEMPLE AND GOD IN LYING POSTURE

Figure 9

ratham represents the imperceptible, the formless, the timeless, the wordless, the silent, the Paramatman. He is the goal, as in a temple one needs to go through the different prakaharas to reach the garbha griha so in the ratham there are various levels to be crossed before reaching the lotus feet of the lord seated at the centre.

In addition the arrangements of the images in the ratham represent the process of evolution on earth. In the lowest rung are place the Pancha bhoota ganas, representing the five basic elements (fire, earth, air, water and ether). They are followed by the rakhyasas, animals and yalis. This is followed by the plants and animals placed mostly in the corners and niches of the ratham. Above them is the manusaya or the humans; above them are the devis and devatas of the devaloka. Just above them is the Shakti or Amman or Prakriti represented by the Ashta Lakshmi along with the insignia of the either Vishnu or Shiva. Just above it is placed the uthsava murti on the simhasana representing the Purusha or the formless in a form. The analogy is that we are all made up of the essential elements coming together to form the Manna, Prana and Sarira (mental, vital and physical) all striving towards the Divine. This represents the evolution of the consciousness from the crudest form to the purest form represented by the elements to the Divine respectively..



The Kalasa and the divine umbrela on top of the vimana of the ratham.

Between the first and the last Nothingness,

Chapter - III

Measurements in ratham and vahanas

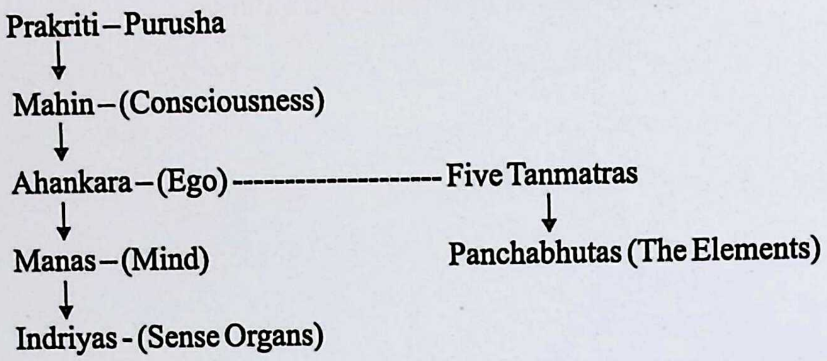
There is a need to understand how the ancient Indian rishis derived the principles of measurements which are used today to make the magnificent rathams and temples. One has to have an idea about the gross matter and their properties which is used for making the rathams. There is a link between the invisible, micro, macro and gross to that of the aesthetics of the ratham which we so much appreciate. We need to understand the link between the five elements which make up the universe and the relative arrangement and proportion of these elements to bring in the rhythm, beauty and vibration that we observe and feel the presence of God in everything that we perceive. This chapter gives a brief description of these five elements, measurements and proportions used as described in the scriptures.

Principle of Five Elements

The five basic elements called as Panchabhutas (Mahabhutani) are Prithvi, Ap, Tejas, Vayu and Akasa. They are simplified and designated as Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Non Material ubiquitous (Ether) substance respectively. One needs to understand that there is a much wider connotation and significance of these elements. Each element needs to be understood in relation with other four elements. The Chandogya Upanishad clearly describes that "Brahman, desiring to be many, created Tejas, Ap Krisiti and entered into this". The Taitiriya Upanishad describes that from the Atman (Soul) verily arose Akasha from Akasha, Vayu, from Vayu Agni, from Agni Ap and from Ap rose Earth, from Earth herbs, from herbs food, from food semen, from semen the person or Purusha. All the major Upanishads mention about the elements. There are many orthodox system of Indian Philosophy as the Shamkhya, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Jain, Buddha and the Carvaka.

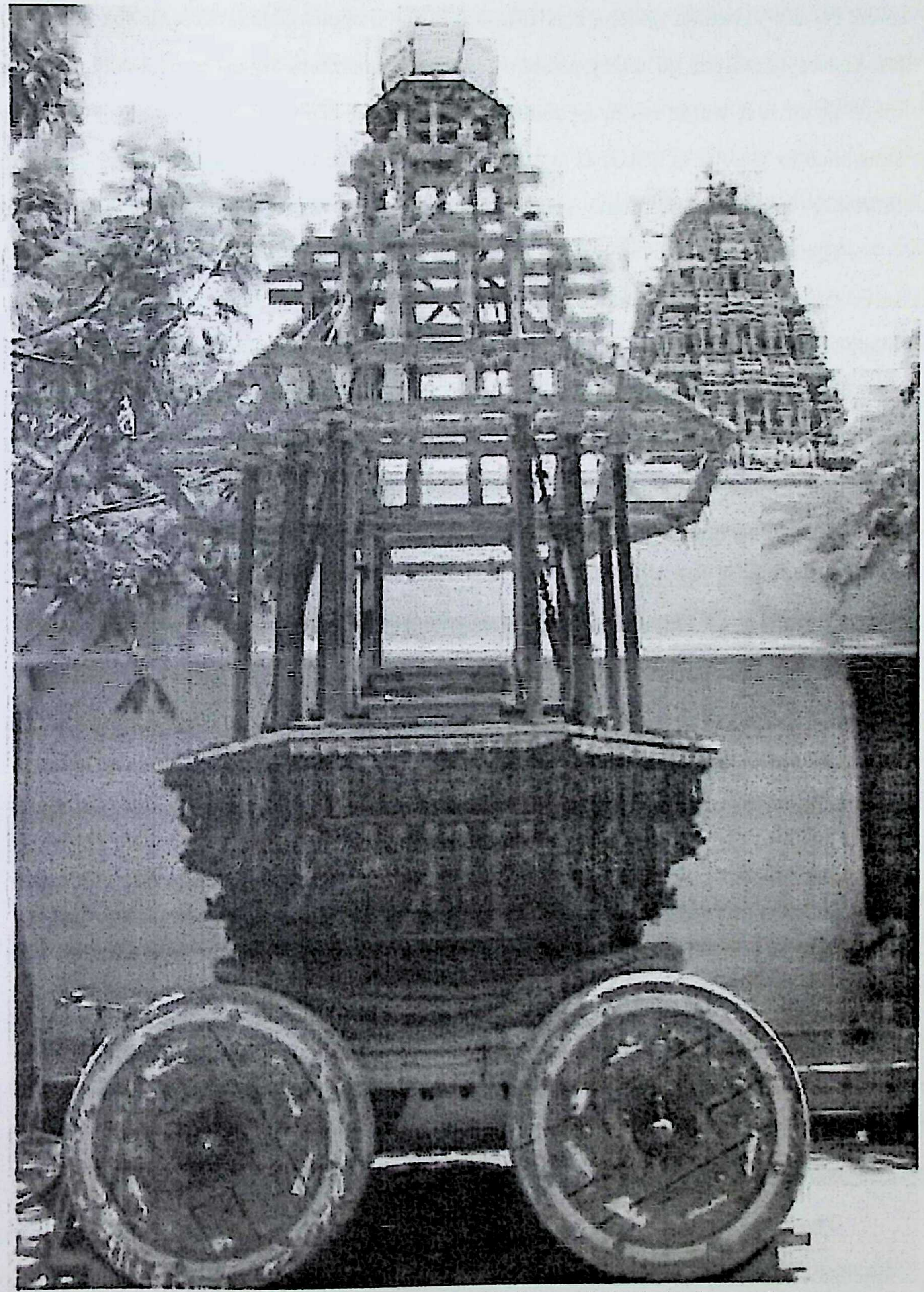
The Tanmatras are considered to be invisible and eternal while the corresponding elements produced are not eternal. It is very difficult to exactly define the Tanmatras. Probably they have features of mind and matter and represent the very core of the elements in their finest states. The five elements also have individual attributes relating to the five sense organs, thus Akasha has sound, Vayu has sound and touch, Tejas has sound, touch and odour, Ap has sound, touch, color and taste, Prithvi has sound, touch, color, taste and odour.

The Shamkhya Philosophy describes the genesis of elements as:



Hence the integrated concept of the element includes the gross form and the senses. In other words the Tanmatras has the power to influence both the sense and the gross of the elements. According to the Shamkhya Philosophy all the gross things are made up of grouping and regrouping of the five elements. "Satkaryavada" says that nothing can be created which is non-existent. The rearrangement of these five elements results in the unmanifest becoming manifest. This manifestation keeps evolving through transformation and all the five elements are involved in this process of transformation and the evolution thereof. The whole science of Ayurveda is based on the knowledge that human body is made up of the Five Elements and the soul. The Susruta-Samhita describes in great detail the role of elements right from the birth of an embryo to the full development of the Sarira or physical body. This interplay continues till the dissolution of the physical body at the time of death. The five elements are also associated with six tastes or Rasa, Madhura is associated with Prithvi and Ap, Amla is associated with Tejas and Prithvi, Lavana is associated with Ap and Tejas, Tikta is associated with Akasha and Vayu, Katu with Tejas and Vayu, Kasaya with Prithvi and Vayu. Yet one should not think that the two particular elements make up the particular Rasa, they are only predominant while the other three are also present.

The material world emerges out of Shakti as a result of interaction with Purusha, Prakriti unfolds or evolves itself. In this process Matter in the subtle form and later in gross form owes its origin to the Gunas – Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. The Gunas form the constituent principle of the universe, matter is its offshoot due to intermingling of these three gunas. The other systems of philosophy have also described the feature of each element in great detail; the underlying principle is that all the knowable or sensorial objects are made up from the basic five elements.



The undecorated ratham of Kamatchiamman koil with the temple in the background.

The underlying patterns of the unseen:

In the Nyasa-Vaisesika system, classification of the five elements is directly linked with the five senses, the visual, gustatory, olfactory, tactual and auditory organs respectively. These are made up of fire, water, earth, air and Akasha. Another aspect of this system is that every substance or dravya is linked to the five elements by certain features. They are the guna (attribute), karma (action), samay (generalist), visesa (particularity) and somvaya (inherence).

The ratham is made up of physical matter and the knowledge of the properties and the science behind it also is as much important as the symbolism it carries. The rathakara or the Stapati needs to internalize the spirit behind the matter as he proceeds to create the ratham. Thus the ratham carries this Spirit which can be felt by the viewer long time after the Stapati is gone physically. Hence even though one does not know the individual silpi of the devarathams and the great temples of India, the Spirit or the soul in them is everlasting and very much living. One feels it and realizes it and gets the touch and link to the Divine through the images individually and as a whole.

Ancient Indian principles of measurements

The ancient rishis describe the *Paramanu* as the smallest discernible mote in the sunbeam and is called as the *trasarenu* as propounded in *Varahamihira*. One can further describe

8 Paramanu make one Rajas or ratharenu,

8 Rajas make a balagra (filament of hair),

8 Balagras make one Liksha,

8 Likshas make one Yuka,

8 Yukas make one Yava,

8 Yava make one Angula,

24 Angula make one Hasta (cubit or approximately 18 inches).

Hence the thickness of minimum visible is the finest perceptible mote in a slanting sunbeam is therefore taken to be 3x2(to the power of -20) or 1/349525 of an inch.

The *Shamkhya- Patajala* considered the Paramanu to be infinitely small with definite dimensions and further divisible into *Tanmatras*, which themselves were integrations of *Bhutadi*.

It is very important to know and understand that the entire shilpashastra depends on various proportions and measurements which are used for carving out the images of gods, goddesses, etc. It forms a science in itself for the making of the rathams and everything in the Hindu pantheon. It forms the base or the adhara for visual presentation of the symbols of the Divine and its manifestation in the Hindu religion , be it idols of gods and goddess, apsara, asura, animals etc depicted in the temples, vahanas, rathams etc. Hence it imperative to provide adequate description of the science behind measurements and devices used for carrying out this measurement. The physical world that we see and interact with has a direct connection with that of the other worlds including the Spiritual world towards which we are progressing. The Brahman (Self) is absolute reality, absolute intelligence and absolute bliss. Maya is the power (gives form) to realize the unreal, the world evolves out of this Maya and can be said to be same as Prakriti of the Shamkhya School of philosophy. Maya or the world originates from Brahman, not by the process of evolution but by Vivrata (self-alienation). This self-alienation of the Absolute (or the Divine or Purusha) acting through Maya produces in the beginning *akasa*, which is one, infinite, ubiquitous, imponderable, inert and all pervasive. The world goes on evolving in increasing complexity. All other sukshma bhutas, classes of subtle matter, evolve from akasa in an ascending linear order. *Akasa* giving rise to vayu, vayu giving rise to tejas, tejas giving rise to apa, apa giving rise to kshiti. Each of the above have different properties. There are five types of Mahabhutas (gross matter) corresponding to the five sukshma bhutas. The process of the formation of the Mahabhutas from that of the sukshma bhutas is called as Panchikarana (quantiplication). One needs to understand that each of the Mahabhuta contains all the five sukshma bhutas in different proportions to give them each different qualities. The Mahabhuta Akasa manifests sound : vayu, sound and mechanical energy; tejas, sound, mechanical energy, heat and light; Apa, the energy of taste stimuli in addition; finally earth, the energy of smell stimulus added to all the above. Some say that Akasa, ether never enters a component part and is always one and indivisible. Thus only the four Mahabhutas Vayu, Tejas, Ap and Earth interact.

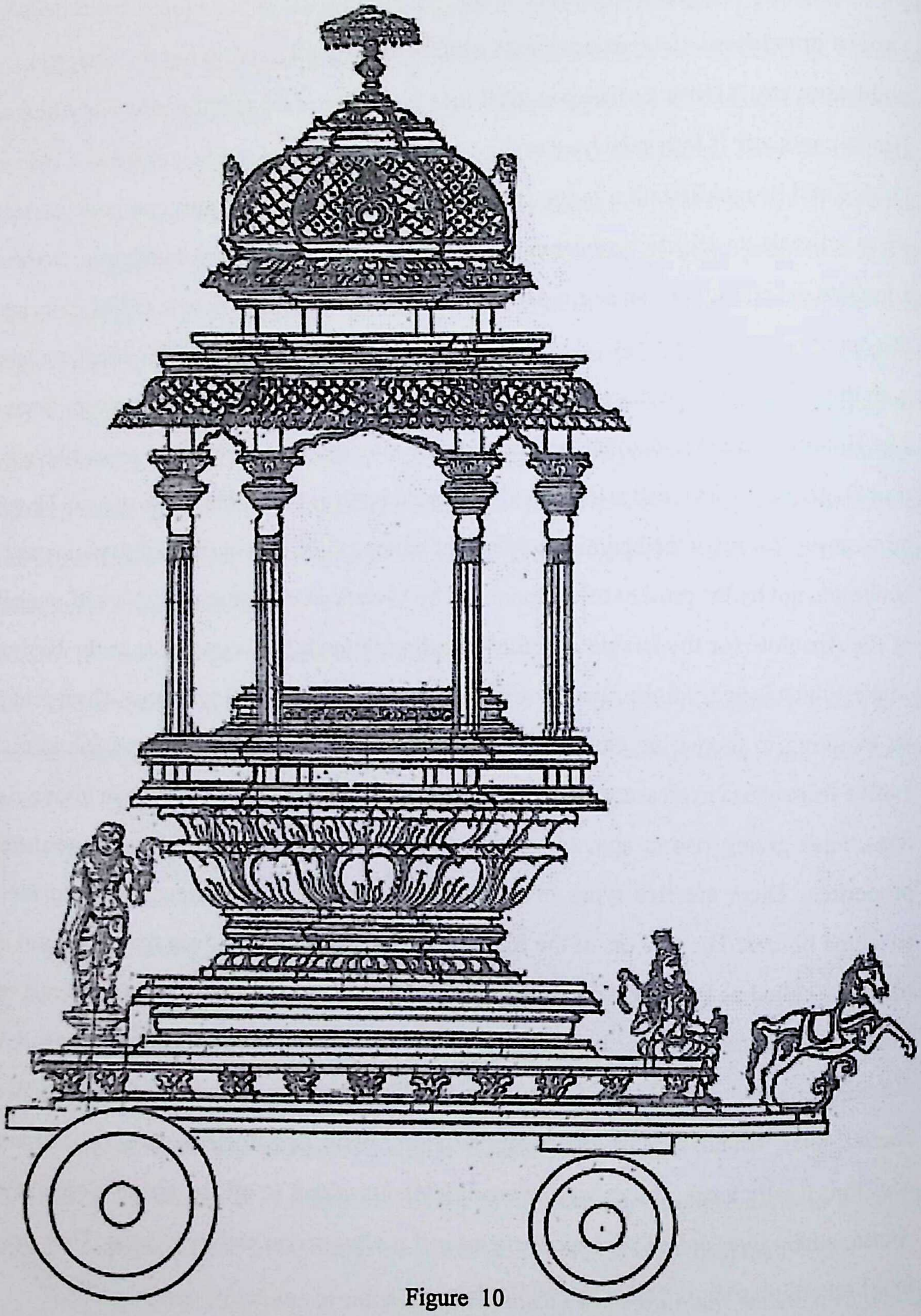


Figure 10

Simple devaratham-mostly made from silver or gold complete with wheels, base, horses, Brahma, Vimana, Dwaja, and Kalasa etc. They are very simple in design with the front wheels smaller then the back wheels. It is tilted to the front when stationary and thus can easily be pulled during the rathayatra.

The ancient scale: KOL

KOL is the traditional measuring rod used to measure the length in the ancient times. The standardized KOL for linear measurement has been arrived at by vary laborious calculation is given below:

8 Paramanu = 1 Trasarenu,

64 Paramanu (8 Trasarenu) = 1 Romogram

8 Romogram (512 Paramanu) = 1 Liksha

8 Liksha (4096 Paramanu) = 1 Yookan

8 Yookan (32768 Paramanu) = 1 Yavam

8 Yavam = 1 Angulam

12 Angulam = 1 Vitasati

2 Vitasati = 1 KOL (Kishku)

It's difficult to standardize this calculation as the Paramanu is not visible. Some agreed to use the thickness of Tila seed (sesame) as a small unit. A Yavam was the thickness of 8 Tila seed placed one over the other. Here also lies the difficulty as the Tila seed can vary in size depending on many factors. KOL is also known as Kishku, Karam, Aratni, Bhujam, Doss, Musthi etc. The basic unit used by most Sthapati is the angulam made up of 8 Yavam. Angulam means the finger. Some classify two types of measurement as Uttamam when 8 Yavam make the angulam and adhamam as when 7 Yavam is used for the Angulam. There are various types of KOL for different purposes. A KOL with 25 angulam is called as Prajapatyam and used for measurements of construction in connection with the Vimana and the Ratham. A KOL of 26 angulam is called as Dhanumusthi. Dhanumusthi and Vaipulyam are used for the king. A KOL with 26 angulam is called as Dhanugraham which is used for measurement of Brahmin houses. Similarly KOL called "Kishku Prachayam Ca Suderanam" has the KOL with 28 angulam for the house of the Sooudras. Similarly Prajapatyam with 25 Angulas and Vaideham with 29 Angulas are used for Vaisyas. Similarly, there are other KOLs which are used for different measurements.

The angulam is itself categorized as Uttamam, Madhyamam and Adhamam with 8, 7 or 6 paddy grains placed next to one another breadth wise. They are considered as best, better and good respectively. Thus for each type of KOL mentioned in the previous paragraph can be further classified as Uttamam, Madhyamam and Adhamam. There is another classification of the KOL in which it is 8 types according to the number of Angulas, varying from 24 to 31. Each is again sub-classified as Uttamam, Madhyamam and Adhamam according to grains used for making the unit of angulam 8, 7 or 6 respectively. There is also local influence in choosing the KOL by the Sthapati. It is interesting that the angulam (the breath of the finger) is finally used as the unit of measurement for the ratha nirmana (crafting of the ratham). As the breath of the finger differs for each individual Sthapati, we observe a difference in the actual measurements of different rathams made with the same formula. This is also true in case of the largest ratham at Puri for lord Jaganath which is made new every year. There is always a slight difference in the measurement of various components like the height, width, wheels, axle, and Vimana measurements year to year.

The Kashyapa Shilpashastra and the Chirppa Chennool gives the details of the rules to be followed for making of the icons. The basic unit of this system is the "tala", the tala is made up of twelve angulas, each angula is equivalent to the breadth of the finger (which one?). Hence the basic unit "Tala" is made up of twelve angulas. It is approximately equivalent to one feet and the angula of that of one inch. Ther icons are again classified according to the length or height measured according to the "tala". Thus we have eka tala (1) Duitala, (2) Tritala(3), Chatustala(4), Pancha tala(5), Shasta tala(6), Sapta tala(7), Astha tala(8), Nava tala(9) and Dasa tala(10).

Each is again divided into three types as Uttama, Madhyama and Adhama meaning superior, intermediate and inferior respectively. Below is the table showing the tala and categories of the Icons and measurement.

Category	Class	Angulas
Eka (one) tala	Adhama	8
	Madhyama	12
	Uttama	16
Dui (two) tala	Adhama	20
	Madhyama	24
	Uttama	28
Tri (three) tala	Adhama	32
	Madhyama	36
	Uttama	40
Chatur (Four) tala	Adhama	44
	Madhyama	48
	Uttama	52
Panchama (five) tala	Adhama	56
	Madhyama	60
	Uttama	64
Shasta (six) tala	Adhama	68
	Madhyama	72
	Uttama	76
Sapta (seven) tala	Adhama	80
	Madhyama	84
	Uttama	88
Ashta (eight) tala	Adhama	92
	Madhyama	96
	Uttama	100
Navama (nine) tala	Adhama	104
	Madhyama	108
	Uttama	112
Dasa (ten)tala	Adhama	116
	Madhyama	120
	Uttama	124

The same principle is used in carving out the various figures which are seen on the ratham. Many of them are carved out first as single or multiple units and then fixed on the devaratham. Some of them are carved out on the logs before fixing them as part of the framework of the devaratham.

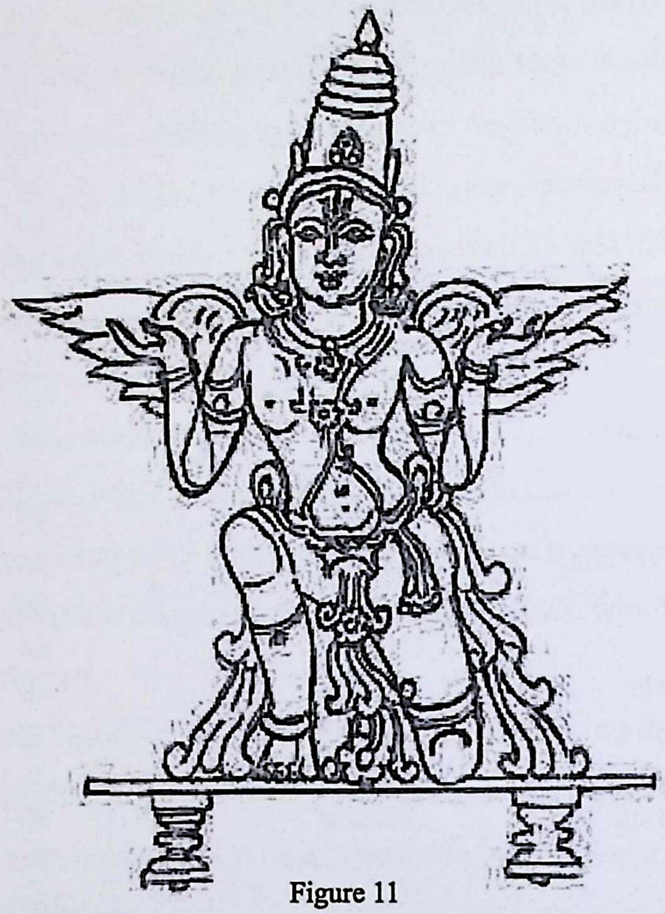


Figure 11

A diagram of the Garuda vahana on a small platform on which the utshavamurti is placed. It may be made from wood, bronze, silver or gold. It is to carry lord Vishnu's (Perumal) Utshavamurti.

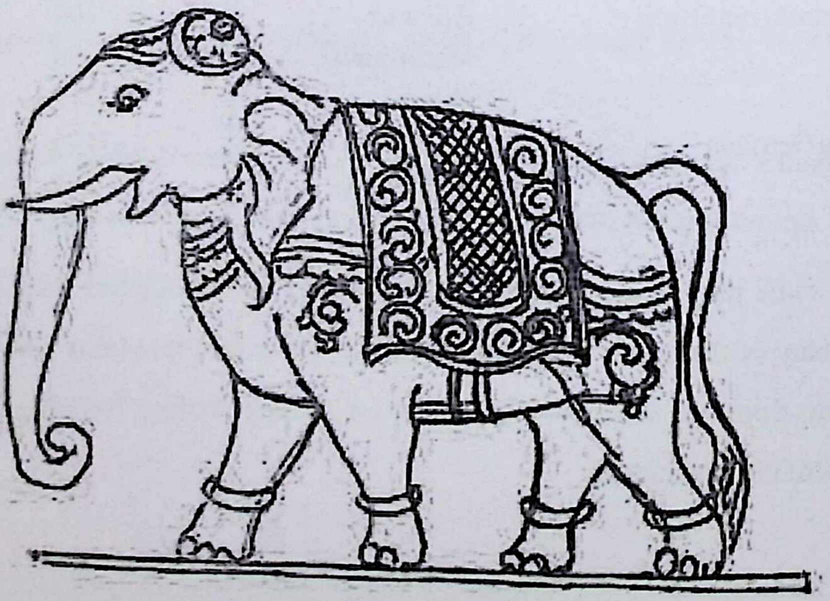


Figure 12

Elephant vahana for lord Indra or Shiva

Vahanas in relation to the Devaratham

The vahana literary means a vehicle used for traveling from one place to another. The vahana specifically relates to the different gods and goddesses in Hindu religion. The vahana forms an important aspect for identification of the deity along with other features. There are different stories related as to how a particular vahana has been acquired by a particular god or goddesses. The Vahanas are usually animals presented normally or in zoomorphic form (face human and body of the animal). They have to obey their lord's command and take them wherever their lord desires to go. Symbolically they may form part of the lord. Hence when the uthsava murti or Pratima murti is taken out in procession outside the temple premises, they need to be placed on their traditional vahana and then carried out. Hence the need to make vahanas, they are mostly made from wood, in later times some were made from silver as well as rarely from gold. The temple ratham is much more elaborate and depicts the temple structure. The deities carved in the panels of the ratham are also shown along with their vahanas.

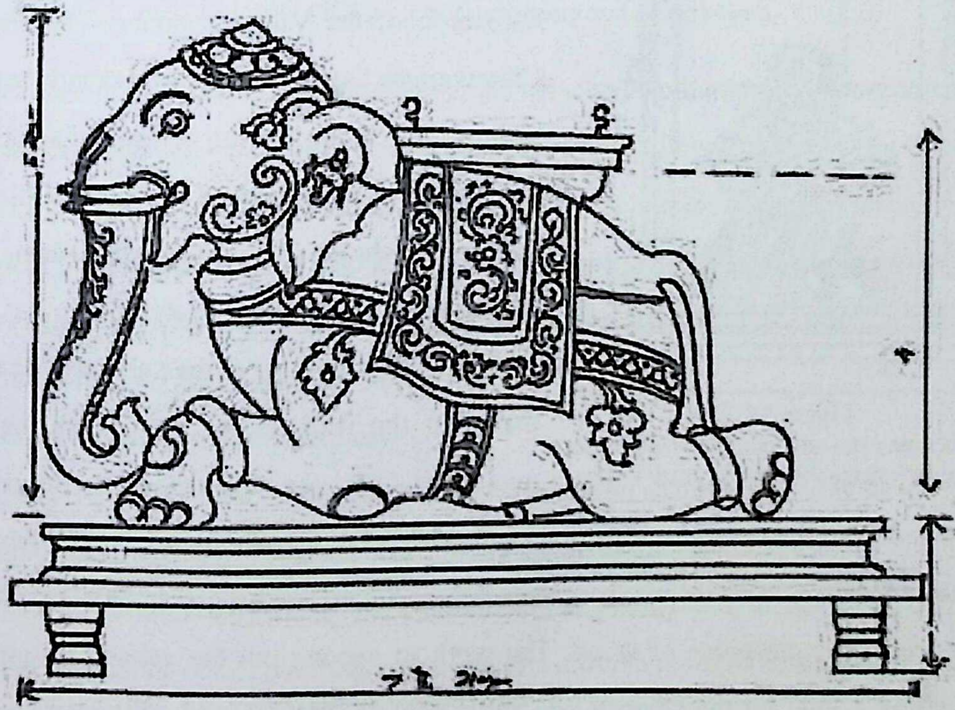


Figure 13

This is an elephant vahana on which either Indra or Shiva is seated. One can see the presence of the hooks on the seat. The Utshavamurti is to be fixed on it so that during the rathayatra, the utshavamurti do not move or fall off.

Individual vahanas are also made in various sizes (Ref table) for the lord to come out during festivals. They may be small enough to be carried by an individual on his head, slightly bigger for two to four persons to carry them or large enough to be placed on a Palanquin. It may be large enough to be placed on a platform with wheels to be pulled by few devotes or placed on a cart to be pulled on by one or two bulls.

Wood type

Teak is the preferred wood by the Sthapati to make the vahana. Due to the very high cost of teak other woods are also used like Mavilingam, Karrungal, Red sandal, Nuna maram, Pala maram, Asthi maram, Manjanathai maram and Ellupimaram.

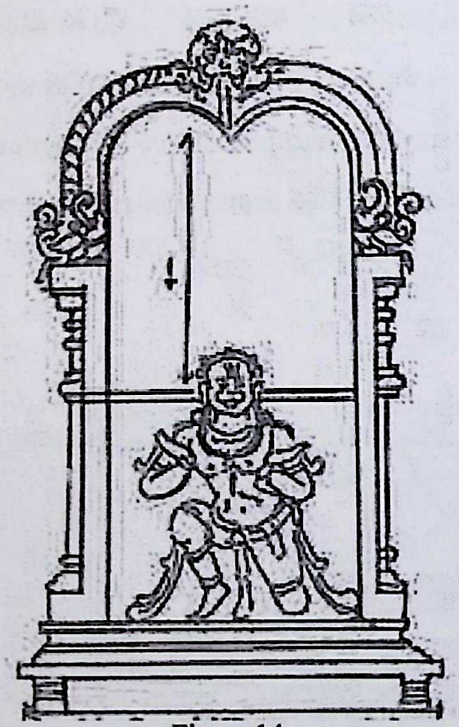
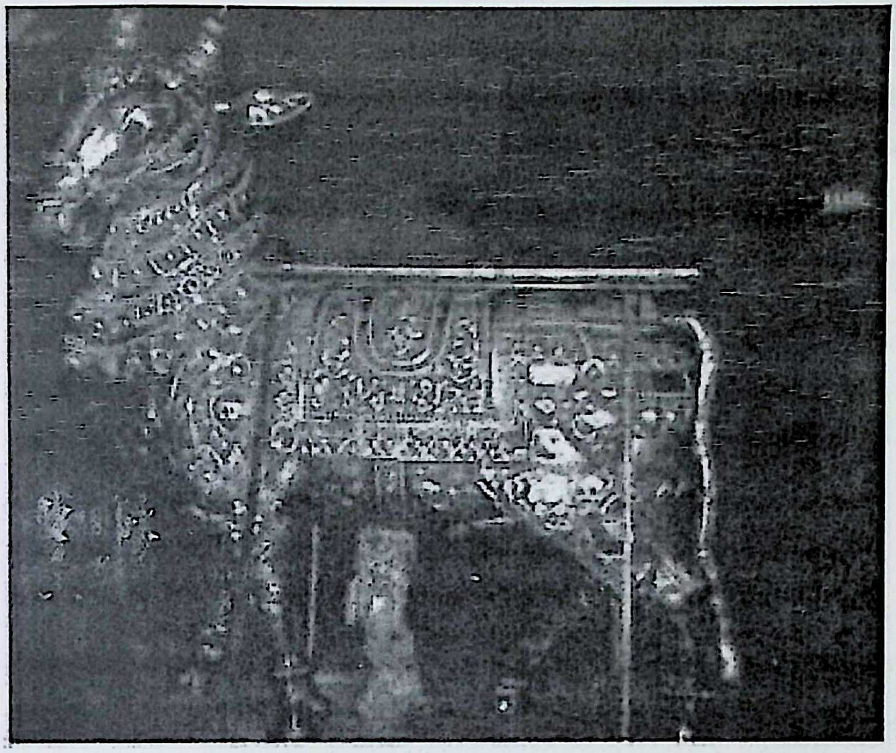


Figure 14
This is an exquisite figure of Hanuman or Anjanayar vahana for lord Perumal/Vishnu

The tree is cut on a full moon day as per the muhurtam (exact time) determined by consulting the Panji or Panchargam, the almanac. The size of the vahana to be carved out is decided on the size of the Uthsava murti to be placed and the birth star or horoscope of the Vahana's donor. The Brahmasya Chitrakarama Sastram describes in detail the principle to be followed for carving of the vahanam. As the name suggests it is supposed that Brahma himself has written the shastra for carving the vahana chitram (Brahmasya Chitrakarama Sastram).

An exact drawing of the vahana to be carved is made on the wall of the temple or the vahana mandapa. Then the amount of wood needed is calculated from the drawing. If the vahana is very large then the figure is split into various segments. Each segment is carved out separately and then joined together. Smaller vahanas are made from a single piece of wood. The work of carving out the vahana is started after conducting a Puja by the sthapati wearing a new dhoti along with the temple priest. On completion of the parts of the vahana they are assembled from the legs to the forehead using wooden or metal plates for support. A thin bleached cloth is pasted on the entire vahana. The



The Vrishabha Vahana of Lord Shiva and Parvati. He is the bull and also called Nandi or Nandikeswara, the divine bull with the power derived from his master Eshwara (Shiva). The vahana is from the Thirukameswara koil of Villianur in Pondicherry and Silver plated

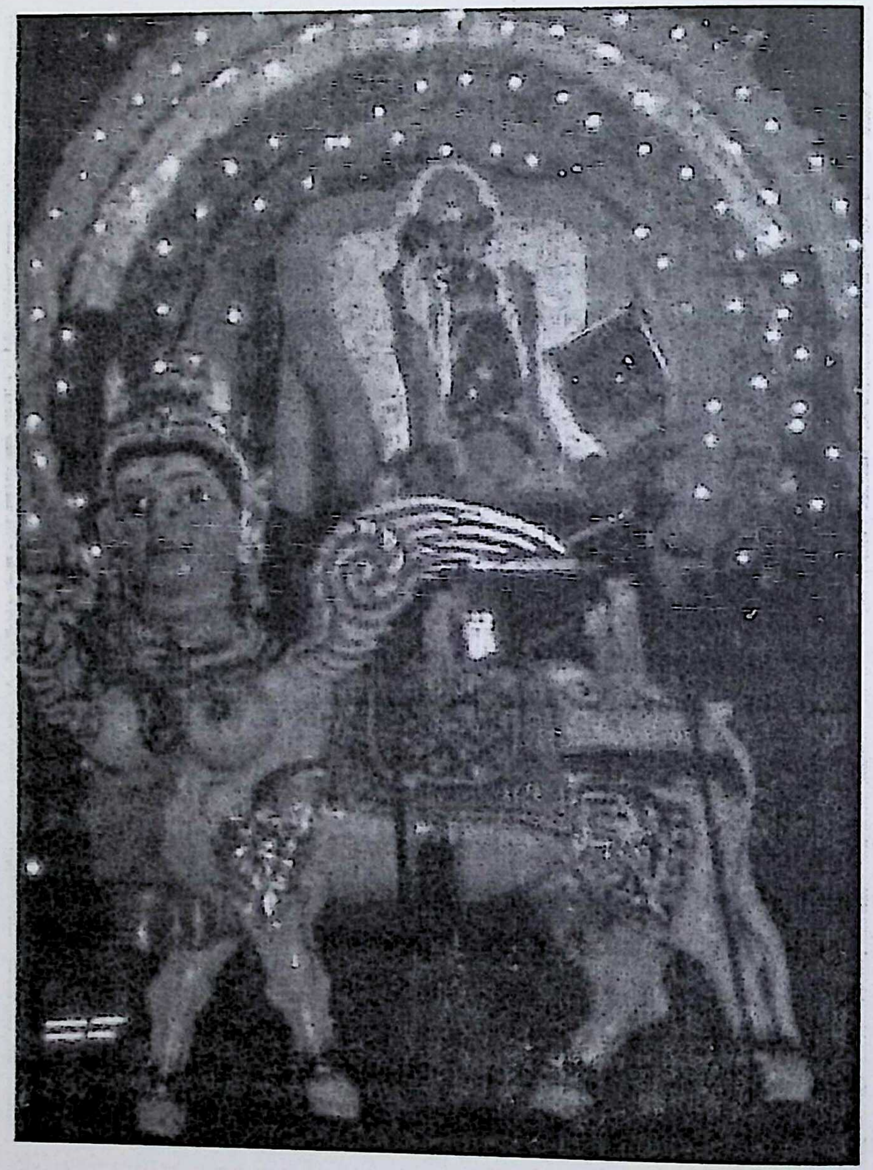
chalk powder mixed with gum is pasted over the bleached cloth or ready mix putty is mixed with water and applied on it to dry. The vahana will have a yellowish color at this stage. Then vegetable paint is normally applied on it. Nowadays preparation is done by use of varnish, wood polish and joints covered by metal paste followed by use of synthetic chemical colors. Some of the vahanas used to be polished like the doors and windows particularly if made from teakwood, with a very finely smooth surface.

Vellottam and eye opening ceremony

On completion of the vahana, consecration is done on an auspicious day by the priest of the temple. The eyes of the vahanam is opened by the Stapati and then the Stapati and his team of workers are honoured by the temple authorities with dhoti, cloth, money, food etc. On the top of the vahana a wooden platform is fixed for the uthsava murti to be seated on during the festival. This is fixed on to the base of the vahana and hooks & rings are provided on the platform to tie the uthsava murti on to it. The priest of the temple is considered the father and the sthapati the mother of the vahana.

The Significance of the Vahanas

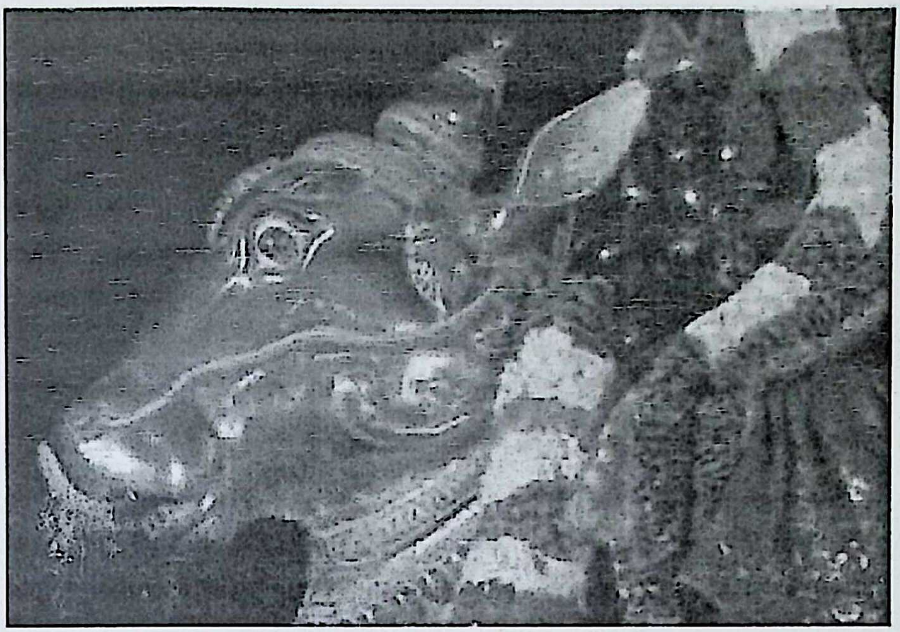
The vahana even though independent is closely associated with the deity and acquires some of the attributes and even draws some powers from the deity. Hence they also have a divine attribute and are considered as semi or demigods. Similarly the vahana of the demons also carry the asuric forces in them attributed to their master.



The Kamadhenu Vahana

Kamadhenu is also called as Surabhi, the divine goddess and mother of all cows. She has the power to provide her worshiper whatever he desires because she is the mother of other cattle as well as the eleven Rudras. She is seen as a white cow with a female head and breasts or as a white cow containing various deities within her body. All the gods are believed to reside in the body of Kamadhenu. Her four legs are the scriptural Vedas; her horns are the triune gods Brahma (tip), Vishnu (middle) and Shiva (base); her eyes are the sun and moon gods, her shoulders the fire-god Agni and the wind-god Vayu and her legs the Himalayas.

Allured her heart throbbed to unknown sweetnesses;



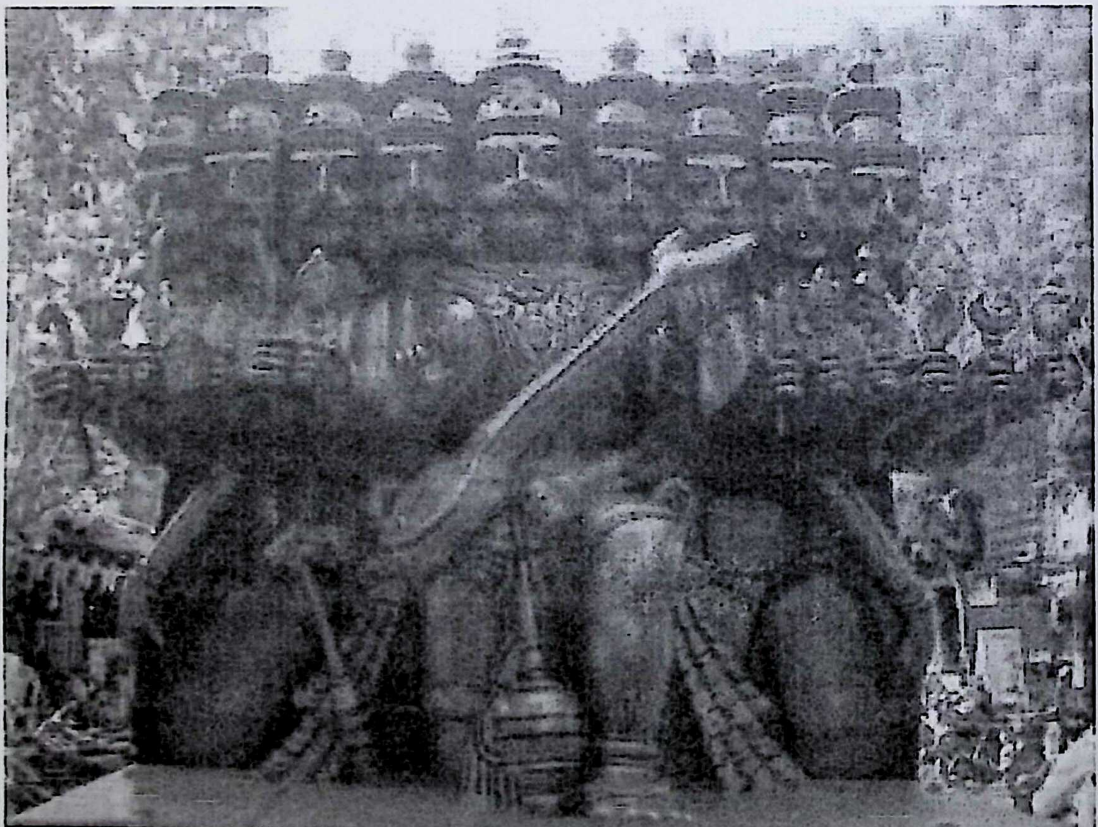
Vrishabha vahana of Lord Shiva and Amman. The vahana carved out of wood and silver sheets placed over it and engraving done to get the details.

Ascend from Nature to divinity's heights

Garuda the vahana of Lord Vishnu is a very large eagle usually depicted with large wings, golden body, a large beak and a human body. It may or may not be holding a snake in its beak. It may be presented alone or along with its master lord Vishnu, sometimes with Vishnu and Laxmi. It is said that Garuda is so big that it can block the Sun God Himself. Garuda is always full of energy, bold and powerful and a great devotee of his masters Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi. Garuda Upanishad and Garuda Purana describe the true significance of this vahana. He has several other names as Syena, Gaganeshvara, Chirada, Vishnuratha, Vainateya, Nagantaka and Suparna. It is said that when Garuda flies the Vedas can be heard with each flap of its wings. Garuda's image finds a place in the flag of Lord Vishnu. Sri Krishna during his discourse to Arjuna during the Kurukshetra war declares "Among the birds I am the son of Vinata (Garuda)" Garuda was born to sage Kashyapa and Vinata. Garuda carried lord Vishnu and Satyabhama during the war with the demon king Narakasura. Garuda took lord Vishnu to rescue the elephant king Gajendra hence is always depicted in panels of Gajendra-moksha. Drawing his powers from the lord himself, Garuda could carry Vishnu to the rescue of Gajendra with the speed of the mind as soon as the elephant king prays for the lord's protection.

Garuda's mother becomes enslaved to Kadru, the mother of all serpents after loosing a bet and Garuda promises to bring the nectar of immortality to the snakes in exchange for his mother's freedom. Garuda brings the Amrita after defeating the defenses put up by the devatas in the form of a fiery ring of fire, two very large vicious poisonous serpents and a machine with sharp blades. He promises Indra to help him retrieve the elixir. He presents the nectar to the snakes and releases his mother, at the same time he urges the serpents to take bath before having the nectar, and Indra steals it while they are busy taking bath. Indra rewards Garuda that henceforth the snakes become his natural food. Vishnu is pleased with Garuda and makes him his Vahana and grants immortality to him.

It is out of scope of this book to go into the details of the other vahanas like Mooshika (ram) for Ganapati, Peacock for Murugan, Bull or Nandi for shiva, Gaja or elephant for Indra, goat for Agni, Crow for sani, Hamsha or swan for Lakshmi, parrot for Rati and so on. The genesis of each vahana has interesting and fascinating stories associated with it. There is also a spiritual significance underlying each story, which teach us something related to our daily lives and are still relevant today.



Kailasa vahana: A great devotee of Shiva , Ravana has cut one head , hand and body parts to make veena and plays it with prayers to please Shiva to forgive him for attempting to lift the Kailasha mountains.

As on some verge between Time and Timelessnes

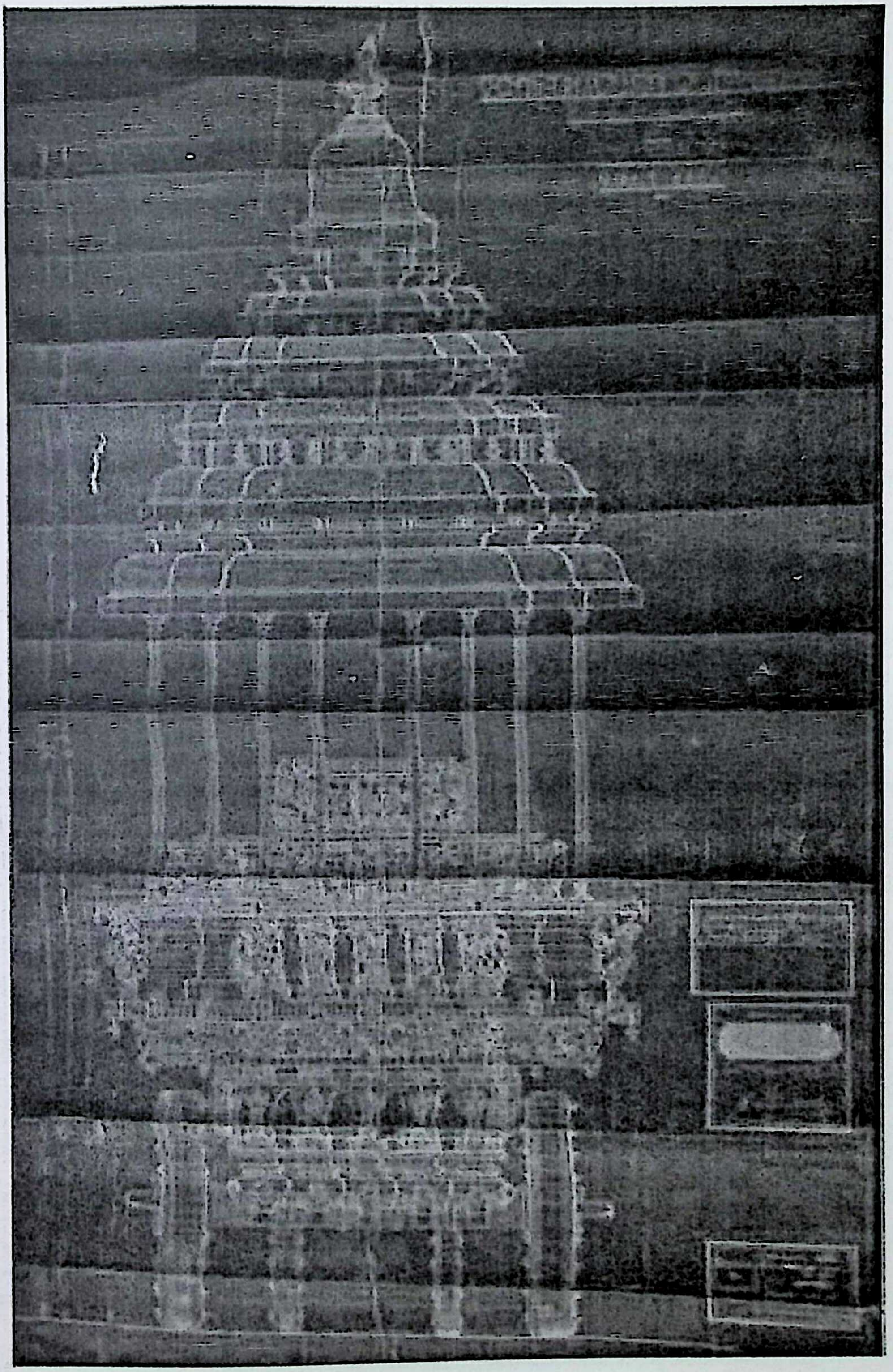


Figure 15

The original blue print design of the present devaratham of Tirupati temple made by the father of Stapati Sri K Rajamani

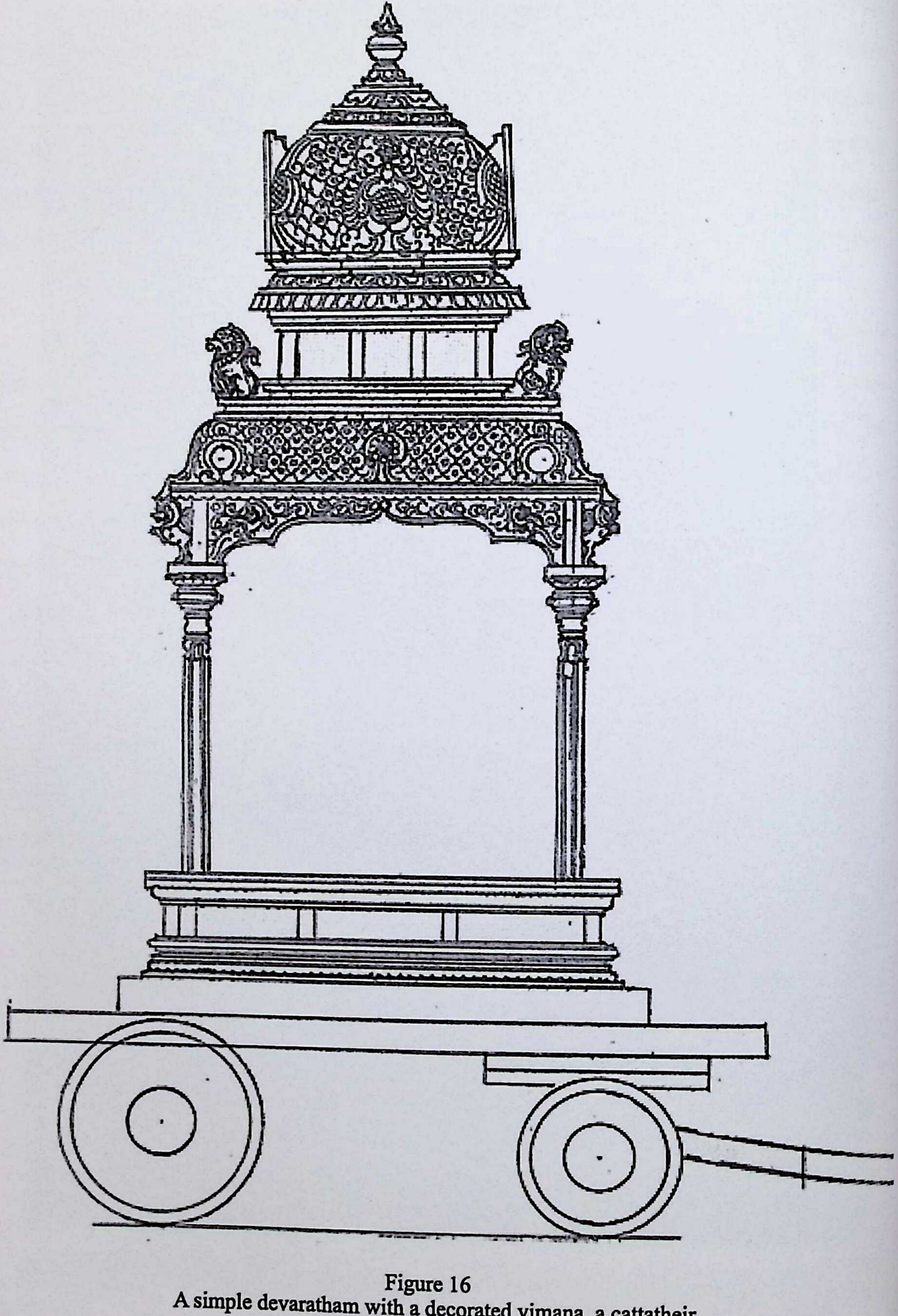


Figure 16
A simple devaratham with a decorated vimana, a cattatheir.

Chapter - IV

The structure and classification of the Devaratham

Introduction

The temple chariot is called "Ratham" in Sanskrit and as "teir" in Tamil language. The temple chariot is also popularly called as "Devaratham" as it is used for the "Devatas" or god and goddess during the rathayatra and ratha-uthsava (car festival).

There are few temples have rathams that are made from silver and gold. The Manakula Vinayaga temple in Puducherry has a silver and golden ratham. As mentioned earlier the stone rathams are immovable and very few places have them, like the one at Vitthala temple at Hampi in Karnataka. Many of the temples have their doorway shaped like that of a chariot with the horses and wheels carved on them and the front of the temple like that of the ratham as in Airavattaswara temple at Darasuram in Tamilnadu. The giant stone ratham at Valluvarkottam in Chennai has been carved by the famous personality, Sri V.Ganapati Stapati in honor of the great poet Sri Thiruvaruvar.

The rathams are called by different names according to their principal features. A Cattatateir is a simple ratham made up of plain set of wooden frames, joined together. Tappateir is a floating ratham made of wood which floats like a boat on the temple tank or puskarani, decorated with burning oil lamps at night during the festival. A goratham is a simple ratham drawn by the cows (go-cow, ratham-car).

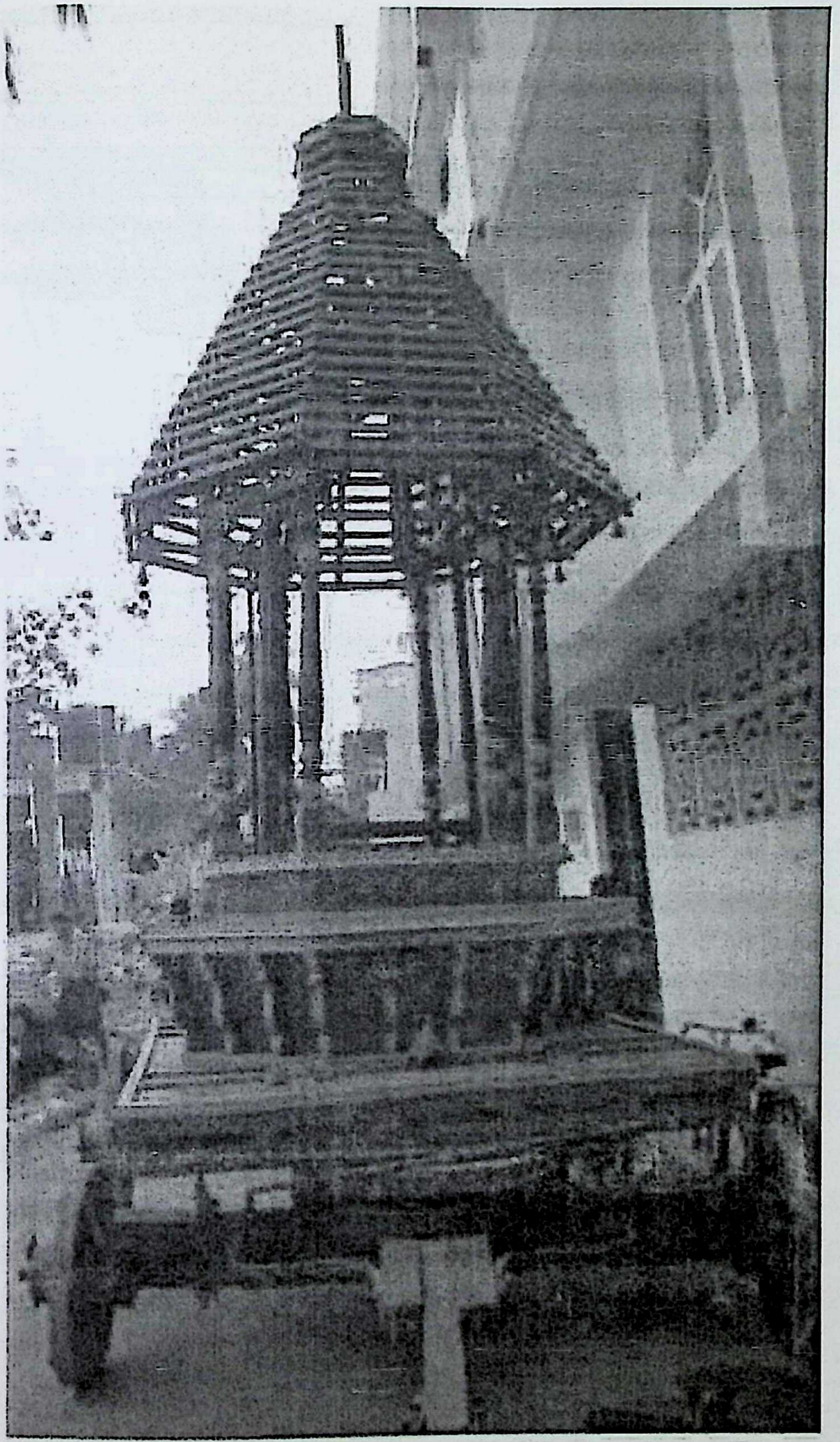
Vairateir is a ratham made from vairam catta or wood with many vairam – diamond like strong heartwood. The Vairateir name is derived from the word vairam and teir, vairam means diamond and teir means temple car. Heartwood is a very strong wood with many diamond like points on it which are very hard and thus resist worms and pest infestations. It also lasts for few hundred years as it can withstand exposure to rain, dust, wind, etc. Many of the Vairateirs are also called as Chittram teir. It is again derived from the word Chittram – meaning a drawing or picture because of the beautiful sculptures of the god and goddess that are carved out on pieces of wood and fitted as panels on the ratham (teir), hence the name "Chittaramteir". Most of these Chittaramteir are very large with elaborate and exquisite carvings in multiple tiers.

The cattateir being simple is made up of only a single frame of wooden block. It is often assembled just before the ratha-uthsava and again dismantled at the end of the rathayatra. The blocks of wood are preserved for the next year festival.

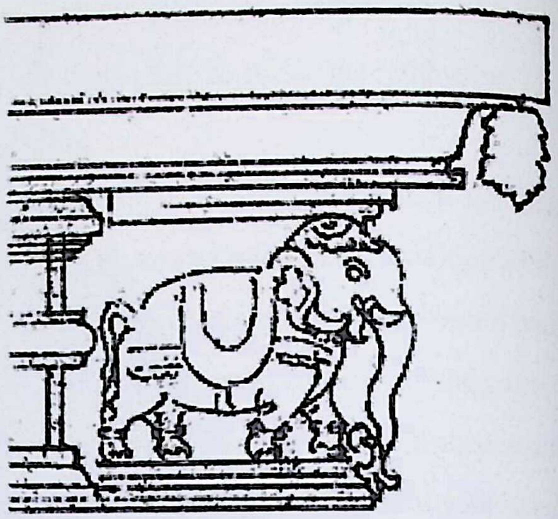
Gorathams are usually small in size, so also the "Thangateir" or golden car and "Velliteir" or the silver car. The golden and silver rathams have a wooden frame on which a thin plate of gold or silver is pressed on the surface. Some of the rathams are entirely painted with golden or silver color to give the appearance of a Golden and Silver ratham. Some of the golden and silver rathams may be more than ten to twelve feet in height. Sometimes the uthsava murti is placed on the vahana, which is placed on a simple cart before being pulled by the devotes. Almost all temples have a few silver vahanas in addition to the regular vahanas made from wood. There are two large silver vahana of Nandi and Kamadhenu at the Thirukameswara Shiva temple in Villianur in Puducherry.

The street on which the devaratham is taken out in procession during the rathaushtava or festival is called the teirtheru or car-street. This is usually a perfect square all around the temple, so that a complete parikrama of the temple is made during the rathayatra. This is also sometimes called as the rajavedi (the lord is the Raja or king and the street devoted to him). The four streets are said to be symbolic of the four Vedas. The deva ratham is usually placed opposite the east gate or gopuram facing south and the place is called as "Theiradi". When more than one ratham is present as in Villianur Shiva temple, the Vinayaga ratham is always in the front. This is usually followed by "Amman ratham" and then the ratham of Lord Shiva.

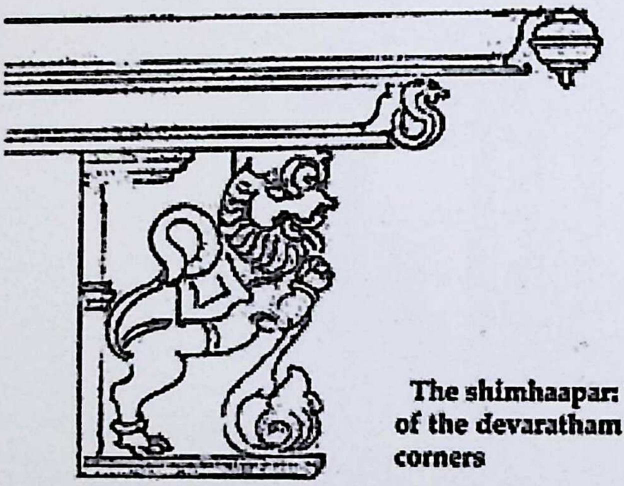
There are a lot of historical evidences in form of inscription, Shastras, commentaries to trace the development of the temple car from simple cattateir – cart like teir to a well developed Chittaramteir or Vairateir with elaborate multi tiered structure with a large number of carvings ranging from miniature figures to large panel presentations which include gods, goddess, bhootagana, shivagana, beasts, mythological figures, yalis and ornamental figures with very intricate designs, towards the end of the fifteenth century.



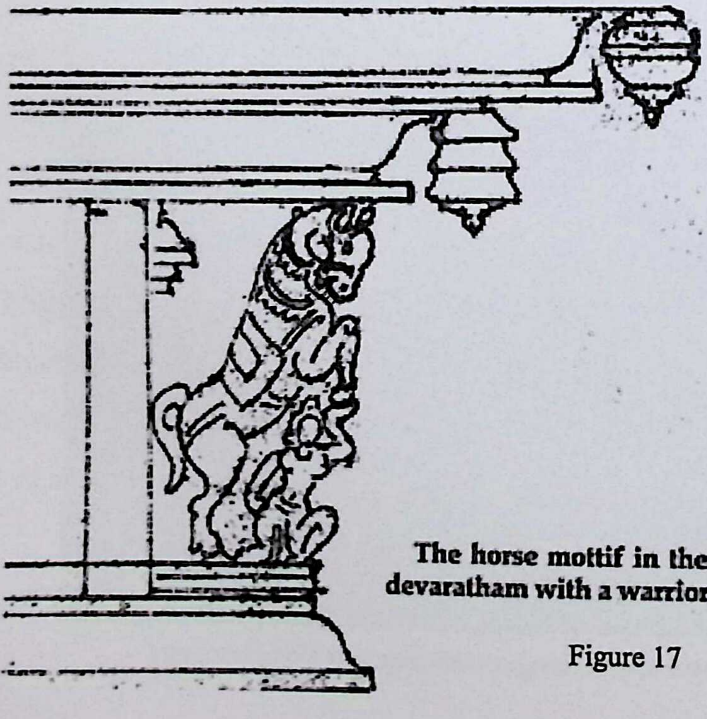
Undecorated catta teir of Sengeniamman koil Pondicherry.



The Gajaapar: The top tier of the devaratham with the elephant mottif at the corners



The shimhaapar: The second or middile tier of the devaratham with the lion mottif at the corners



The horse mottif in the bottom tier of the devaratham with a warrior below

Figure 17

Classification of the Devaratham

Based on the wheel

As per the Vishwakarmiya rathalakshanam and other shastras the temple ratham is always classified according to the number of the wheels. They are Vijaya, Kanta, Sikhara, Visala, Nibhandhar, Srivisala, Bhadra and Bhadravisala. Vijaya is a simple ratham with single wood framework and three wheels. Kanta is a ratham with four wheels and a square base and floor connecting the two axles of the wheels. It has a single tier over the frame. Sikhara is a temple ratham with five wheels and usually with more than one tier along with projections. Visala as it denotes is a fairly large ratham with two to three tiers of carvings and multiple projections. Nibhandhar ratham has seven wheels, Sri Visala ratham has eight wheels, Bhadra has nine wheels and Bhadravisala has ten wheels, each is being progressively larger.

Based on the shape of the Portico

The shape of the portico of the temple ratham can be a simple round or perfect circle, a perfect square, quadrangular, pentagonal, hexagonal or multiple with many angles. Each corner of the platform can be very simple with single facet or it may be with multiple facets.

Based on the size

Even though the number of wheels in a temple car give us an fair idea about the size of the ratham, the Shilpa shastra explicitly classifies the temple rathams according to the size as follows

Patam – it is a small ratham and means a quarter or 1/4th.

Ardham – It is a medium sized ratham and means half or "

Tripatam – It is a large sized ratham and means three fourth or 3/4th

Purnam – It is an extra large ratham and means a complete sized ratham.

The Villianur temple has got three rathams small, medium and large. The Vinayaga ratham is a Patam car, the Amman ratham is Ardham and Shiva's ratham is Tripatam. The temple rathams of Draupadi-amman, Manakula Vinayaga and Varadaraja Perumal are small or Patam, the ratham of Veerapatinam Shakti temple and Sengeri Narashima Perumal koil are Ardham or medium size. There are no extra large rathams at Puducherry but the ratham in Thiruvarur, Thiruvanamalai, and Kancheepuram are extra large and considered as Purnam.

The wheels of the Devaratham

The wheel forms the bottom most portion of the temple ratham. It is also called as Chakram, Kal (leg), Ura (to rotate). Most of them are made from solid wood blocks joined together with plates of steel held by large bolts and nuts. Some of the wheels are made completely from steel provided by the government of India. The axle is attached to the wheels at the center or nabhi or kudam (nodal point). The lynch pin holding it is called the Ani (nail). The rim of the wheel is called patta or vattai in Tamil. The diameter of the wheel is usually half that of the width of the ratham. Hence the wheel may vary in size from twenty inches to forty two inches.

When there are three wheels, all are in a single row and there is a single axle. In case of four wheels they are arranged in two rows with two axles being inter connected with cross bars to form the base of the ratham. In case of five wheels one wheel is placed in between the two sets of wheel. In case of six wheels they are either set in three pairs or two small wheels are placed inner to the larger wheels. Similarly progressively as the number of wheels increase they are arranged in different ways so that there is uniform distribution of the entire weight of the ratham and strong stability is provided when it moves during the rathayatra.

Another classification of the rathams is according to the usage, they are designed differently according to the purpose for which they are made:

Sangramik Ratha - These are for the purpose of fighting or sangrama, hence they are used during wars. **Deva Ratha** - These are used by the temples to take the uthsava murti of gods and goddess on the ratham during various festivals. **Karni Ratha** – They are special Rathams for women, particularly queens, when they travel inside and outside their kingdom. The rich women of the society like the wives of the king's ministers, jamindars, great poetess dancers and others use such rathams. **Vainayik Ratha** - These are rathams designed to give training to drive a Ratham. **Pushya Ratha** - These are special rathams used for the processions by the king, for special events like after a victory in a war, marriage of the princes, swayambra of the princesses' etc. **Kreeda Ratha** - These are designed for competitions like chariot races.

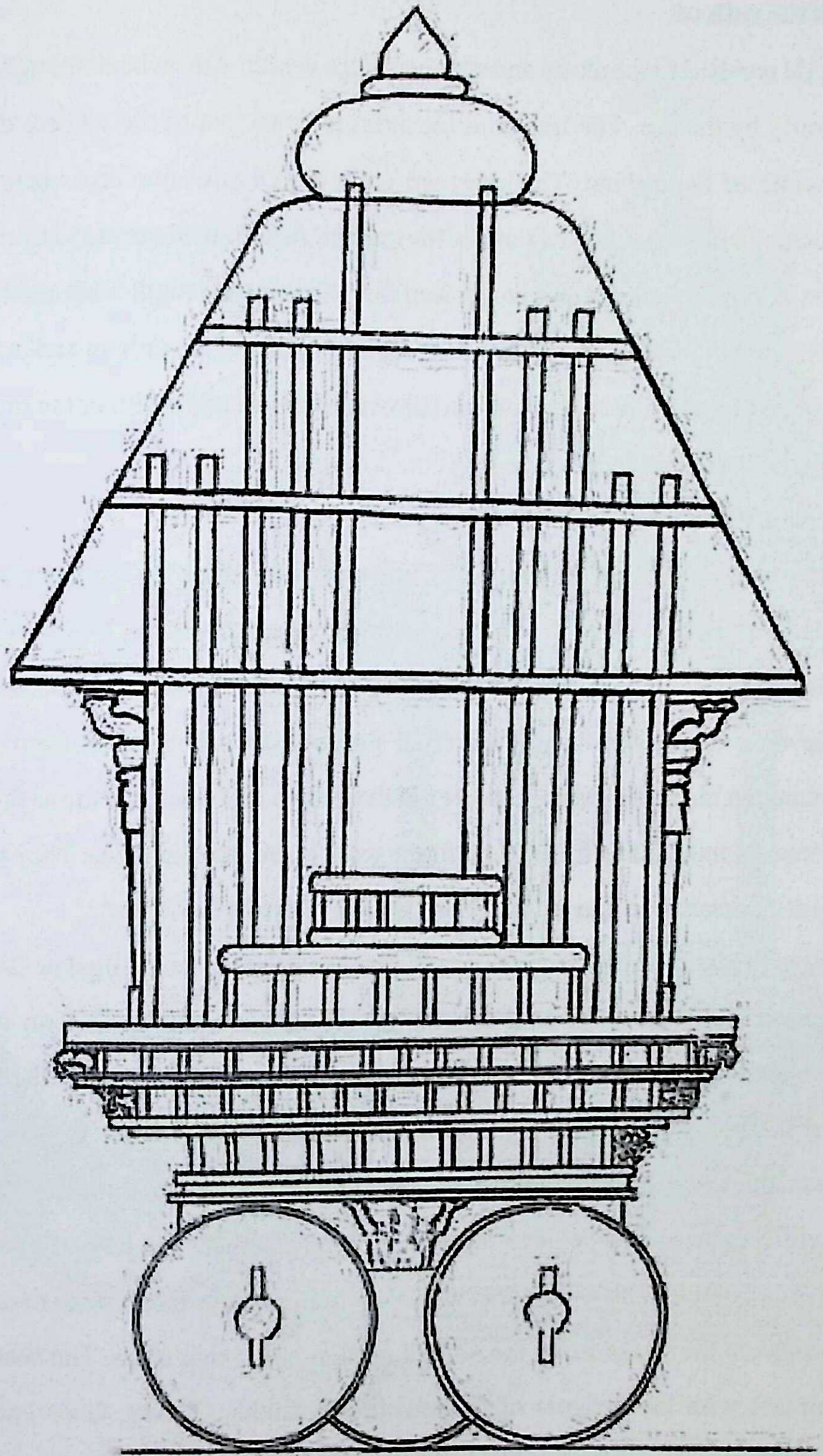


Figure 18
The cross section of a devaratham with the outer and inner wheels, three tiers, nitches for the panels, two tiered simhasana, the supporting beams for the vimana and the filial of the ratham.

The Base of the ratham

The axle is called as the aksha and attached to the center of the wheel through the opening and held firmly by the pin. The length of the axles is twice that of the wheel's diameter and forms the width of the ratham. The axles are cross linked with five cross bars made from wooden blocks. Thus they form the base of the ratham. Additional bars are to be placed on the top of the base, both in horizontal and vertical directions, both length wise and breadth wise forming a criss cross pattern. This forms the "adhara" (base) of the ratham and is usually very strong. The size of these blocks depends on the overall height and width of the ratham, bigger the ratham larger size is these blocks.

Upapitha, Adhisthana and Pada

The next level forms the "Upapitha". The outer parts of the Upapitha are covered with miniature carvings so that the ends of the blocks are not visible. The five blocks across the axle have five Shiva ganas on the ends to denote the five elements – water, air, fire, earth and ether. The next level is the "Adhisthana" which is, formed like a box made from vertical and horizontal wooden blocks to form a frame work fixed on to the base. This forms the second tier and sculptures are fixed in the front of the frame work on all the four sides. They may be fixed slightly slanted upwards, so that the upper part is wider than the lower part.

The next tier is formed by the "Narasana" (pedestal for human beings) or "Manusayana" or Natakashana. Here the vertical and horizontal blocks of wood placed on the Upapitha expanding outwards and upwards to the outer edge of the wheels to end in the flat platform called tertattu. The outer part of the frame work has elaborate carvings. These include gods, goddess, humans, animals, mythological figures etc. The Pada starts at the flat platform at the center of which is the raised pedestal called the Shimhasana for the lord of the ratham. The pedestal is usually rectangular, has either single or double tiers or rarely three tiers. On the first tier we always see the sculpture of the Astha Lakshmi on all four sides. The second tier may have decoration with the insignia of the lord like Shankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma for Vishnu, Damaru and Snake for Lord Shiva. If there is a third tier it is called as Alankarasana. The seat on which the lord is seated is called Devasana (Devata -asana, seat for the Devata or Lord)

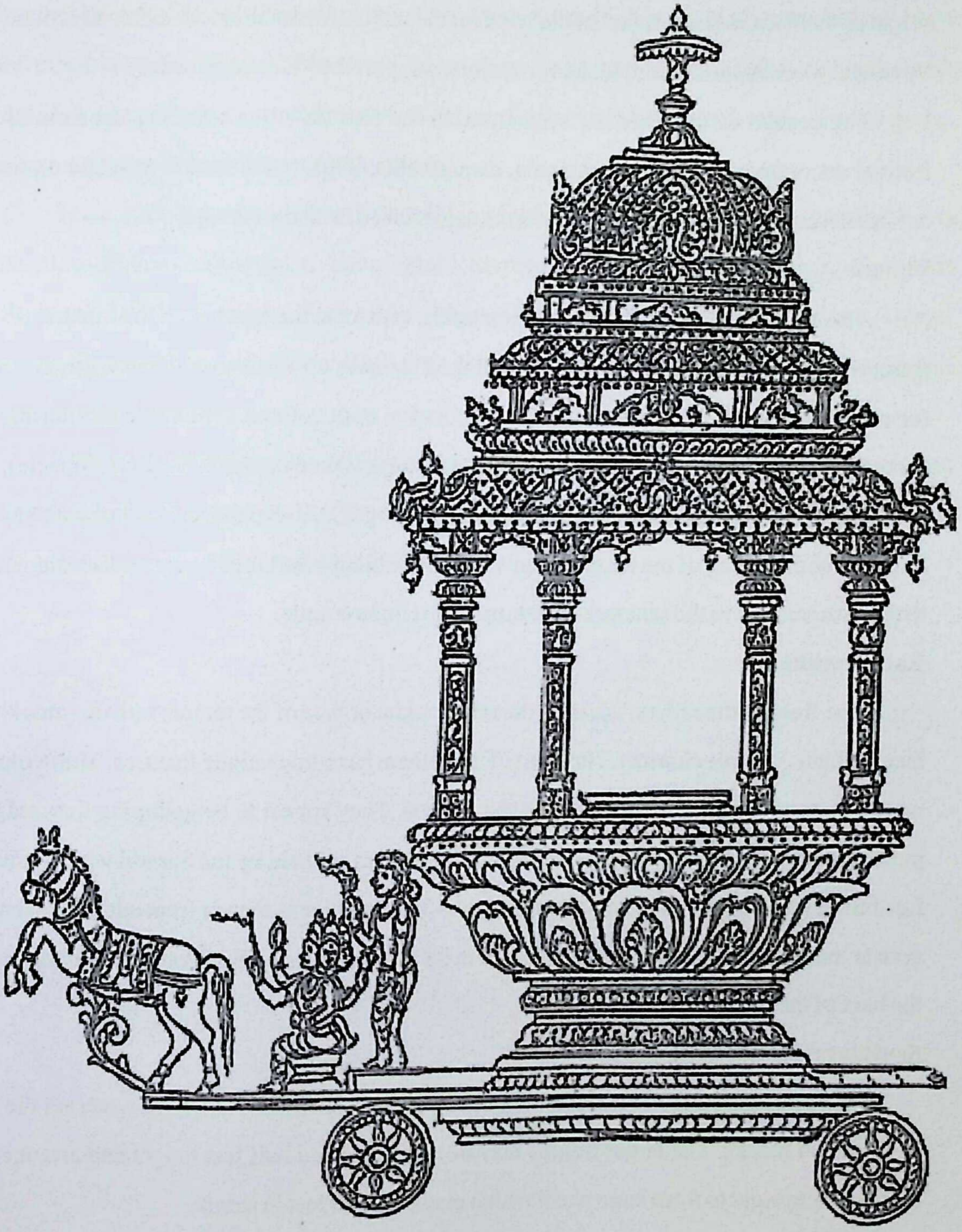


Figure 19
A beautiful small devaratham with decorated base, horses, sarathi, chouli bearer, single layer simhasana and exquisitely carved vimana.

The part further above is called the "Pada" extending upto the base of the Vimana. The height of the Pada is same as that of the width of the ratham. As mentioned earlier all around the Devasana wooden blocks are placed vertically to support the "Vimana" above.

The centers of the Pada are seen from all the four directions. During the time of the festival decorative images of dwarapala, dwarapalika, lions, yalis, etc are attached on to the ratham. Decorative images in appliqué cloth are attached in all the corners.

Vimana

The most beautiful and crowning part of the ratham is the Vimana or the mukuta. It is a framework made from strips of wood interlinked tapering upwards to end in the griva or gala (or neck). The outer part is covered with decorative multicolored appliqué cloth during the time of the festival. Above the griva is the Sikhara (cupola) and then is the Stupa (pinnacle). On the Stupa is placed the Kalasa made of silver, brass or gold. Above the Kalasa is the dhwaja or flag post with the flag of the temple. The Vimana is exactly similar in design and arrangement to the structure above the sanctum- sanctum of the Hindu temple.

Rathamukha

The front of the ratham is called the rathamukha or face of the temple ratham (mookha – face, ratham – temple chariot). The front of the ratham has some unique features. Multicolored wooden horses are attached to it during the festival. They appear to be galloping forward and pulling the ratham symbolically. The reins of the ratham are held by the Sarathi who is usually Lord Brahma seated behind the horses. Goddess Vasuki's face is seen in front and the tail end is seen at the back of the ratham. Lord Vishnu in his tortoise form – "Kashyapa-roopa" is seen at the base of the ratham.

Sculptures

The sculptures vary in size; smaller ones are about six inches in height covering the tips of the wood blocks. The larger figures may be about two and half feet height and arranged in rows of six to eight to form large panel which may be 8 – 10 feet in length.

The temple ratham forms a rich repository of carved images depicting stories from the Vedic times to the present day. The arrangements of various images are guided by the Shastras. Different Shastras give broad principles to be followed in the presentation of the images. Some of these Shastras are Manasara Shilpa Shastra, ***Mayamata, Vishwakarma's Vaastushastra, Iswarashamita, Silpapraknnashamita, Kumaratanta** and **Shilpasastra*** to name a few. There are other specific Sanskrit literatures describing the devaratham like the Vishwakarma's ***rathalakshanam***. There are chapters in the above literature dedicated towards daru sangraha, ratha prathistha, ratha-uthsava, rathayatra etc.

Some of the popular images include lions, elephants, crocodiles, yakasas, nataka bhoota (dancing demon), Shivagana, bhootagana, Serpents –nagas and nagakanyas, Gurupada (Brahma), Varaha (Vishnu), Sanmukha (Muruga), Ganapathy, Saraswati, Sankara, Durga, Kings, Chiefs, Warriors , Priests, Brahmans, Bhaktas, Dwarapalas and Dwarapalikas, Chouli bearers, Garuda etc.

This is a brief description of the components of the ratham and the general features and the various classifications etc. In the next chapter a brief description is made of the many rituals associated with the ratham and the rathayatra.

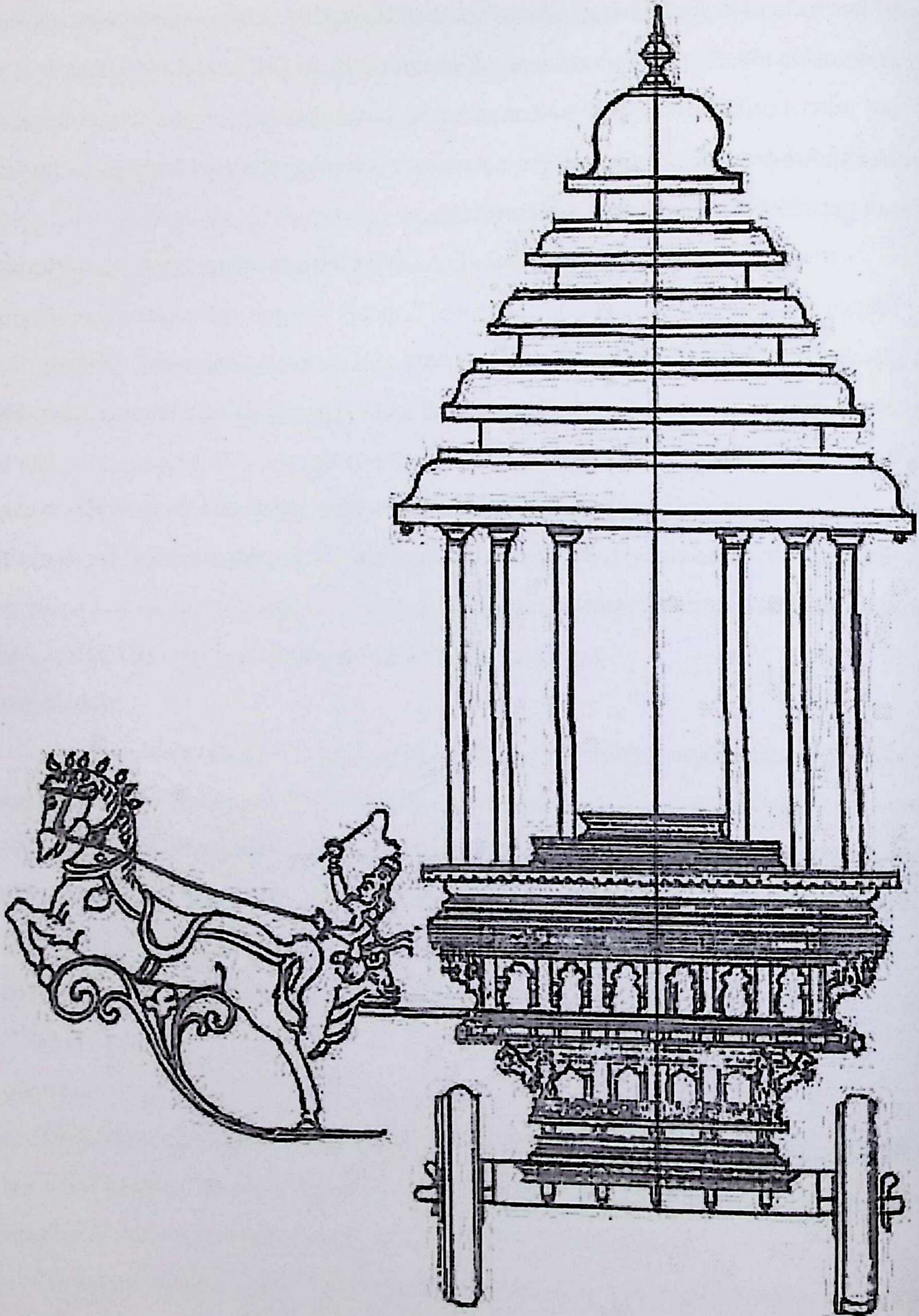


Figure 20

A cross section of a complete devaratham with the sarathi and the horses seen projected schematically. It is fairly small with two layers of panels and undecorated simhasana and the vimana.

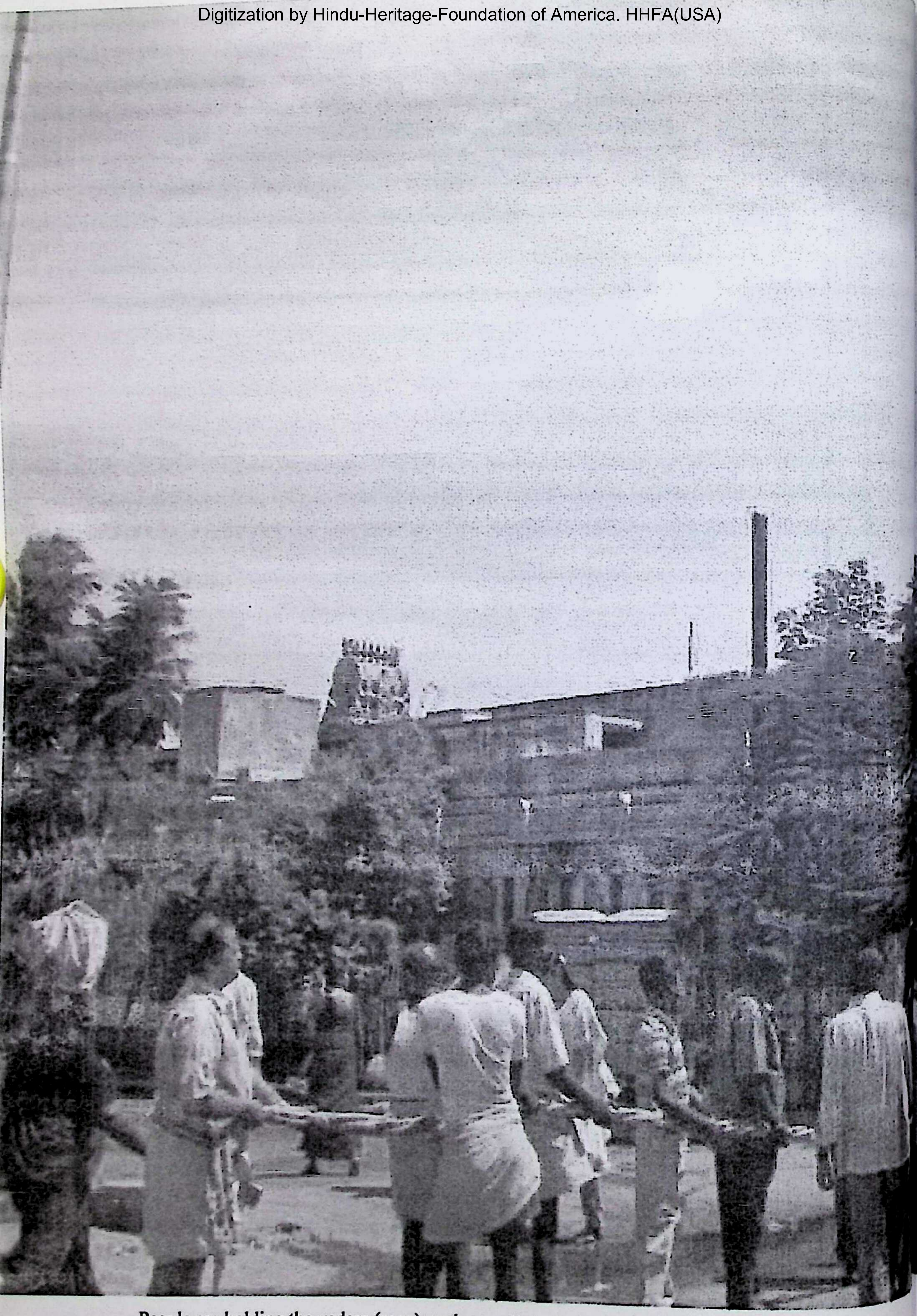
Chapter - V

The rituals of devaratham

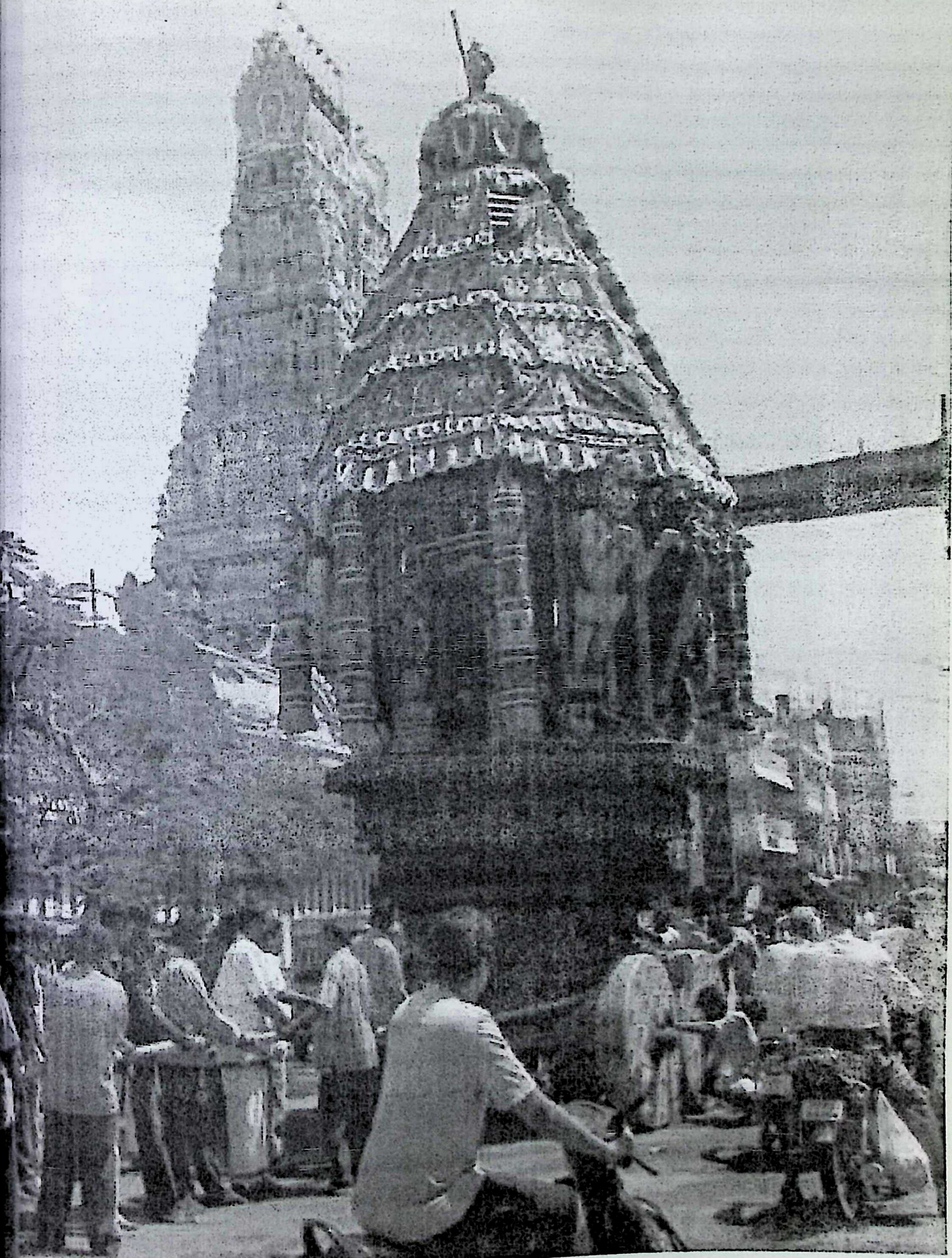
There are many rituals associated with the devaratham and the rathayatra. In this chapter I will briefly describe some of the important rituals associated with the rathams including rituals observed while making the ratham, rituals related to consecration of the ratham before it is used, the rituals during the ratha uthsava and rathayatra. At the end a brief note is included on the social implications of these rituals.

Daru (Drusanghraha)

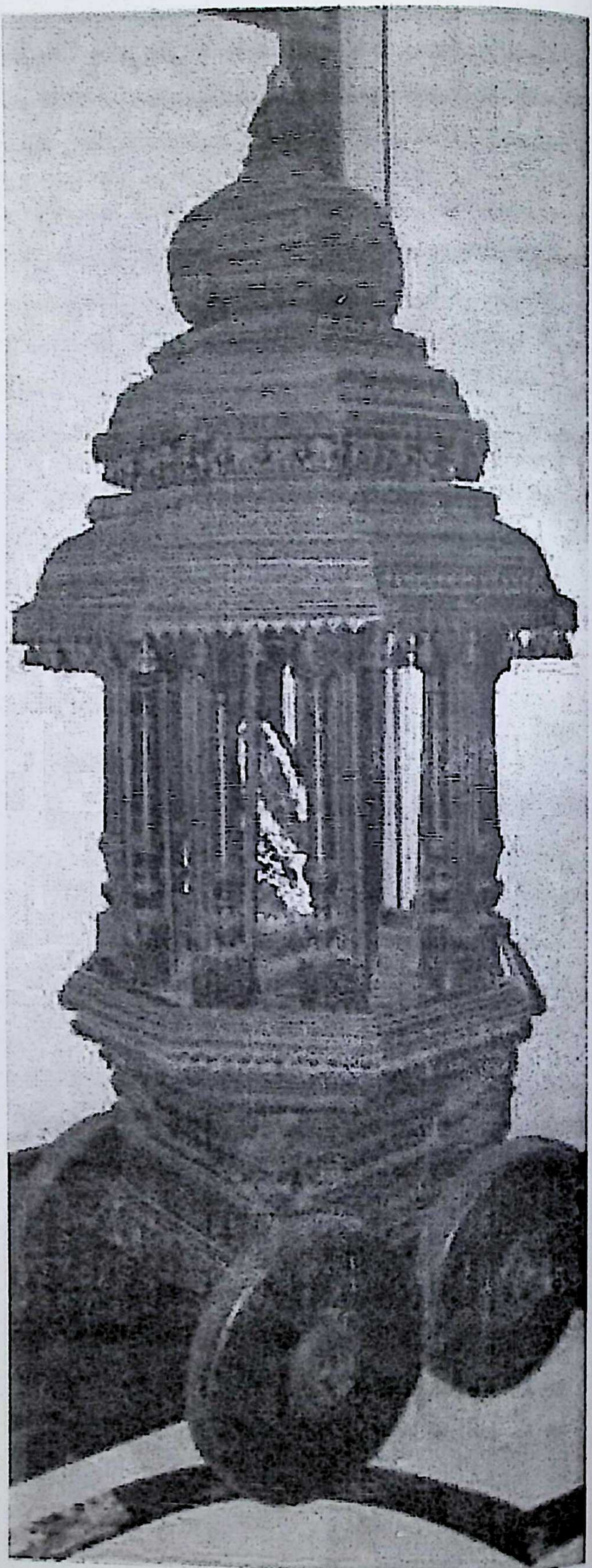
The paraphernalia connected with the collections of wood for crafting the temple ratham is called as "Darusanghraha" (Daru – wood, sangraha – collection). This process is done with great care following the rules prescribed in the scriptures. Hence an Acharya or Brahmin priest well versed with the knowledge accompanies the rathakara and the shilpi to the forest to collect the wood. It is usually done after the end of rainy season. The trees to be cut should not be too young or too old. They should be free from nagas, yakshas, pisachas, rakyashasas and gandharvas. The tree should not have nests of birds or small animals. It should be free from disease and should not have too many knots. Ideally it should be flawless. The wood used to create the ratham must have some salient features described in the Shastras. The trees with holes, crevices or hallow are not acceptable. The trees intertwined with creepers, bearing fruits, flowers continuously are not acceptable. The trees which have birds, animals, trees which are located in cremation grounds, trees with many broken branches, trees which are damaged by winds, fire, animals like elephant (hit by tusks) , trees that are damaged by lightings, etc are not to be used for crafting of the ratham. Soft wood are not to be used, straight, hard and ripe wood are to be used for making of the ratham. This wood should be able to withstand natural events like rain, wind, sunlight etc. The trees not suitable for construction of the house may be used for making the temple provided they are strong and straight. Almost all kesheera trees are acceptable for the construction of the temple. The trees should not be discolored or defective. Graceful trees in holy hills and forests should be selected for making the ratham and the temple. There is a long list of trees which should not be used for the temples and rathams (refer to Bharatiya Vigyan Manjusha edited by M S Sreedharan published by



People are holding the vadam (rope) ready to pull the Perumal koil teir, MG road Pondicherry.

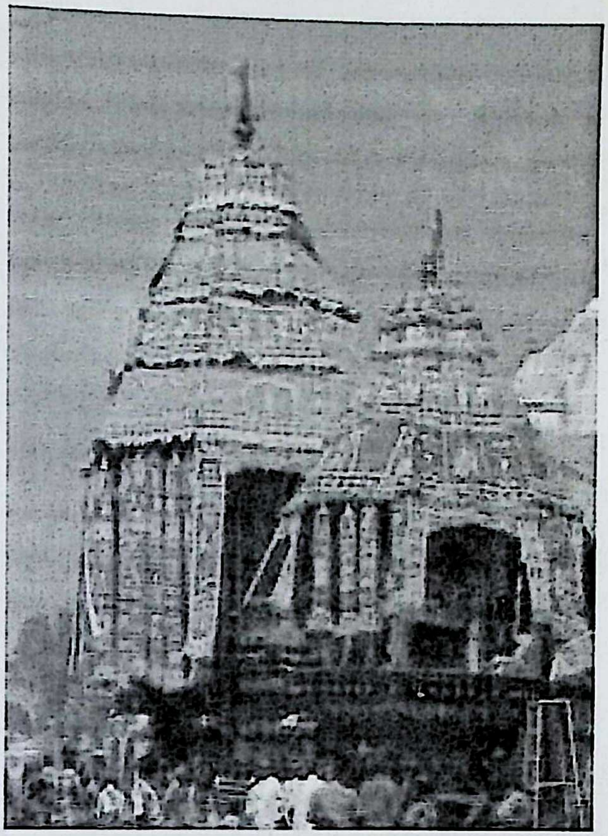


The great world-rhythms were heart-beats of one Soul, government of India). The Khadira, Sala, Madhooka, Sambaka, Simsapa, Arjuna, Padma, Chandana, Danwana, Pindi, Simha, Rajadona, Samee, Talakam etc are known as stamaba trees. Nimba, Asana, Shreesha, etc are female trees. They are used for sacrificial fire during homa and puja. Trees with round and strong straight trunk from top to bottom, having several strong branches are termed as male trees, while the female trees have a stout base but tapering upwards. If both base and top are thin with the mid portion stout the tree is called as napunsaka. After proper identification of the tree to be used for the purpose of the ratha nirmana the Stapati or shilpi should perform a puja called as Baalikarma before cutting the tree. Puja has to be performed at the foot of the tree (roots) to please the bhootagana, devata and Guhyaka (they are the servants of Kubera who is the guardian of all wealth). Lord Shiva and Kuja have to be offered worship. He has to say „"Now that I have offered you all the worship and baali , please let me have the tree, Oh lord Shiva, Kuja, Guhyaka grant me prosperity , permit me to fulfill the mission, you may stay away", then prostrate before the tree



A Small Vinayaga ratham inside a Hotel in chennai

Undecorated ratham, Veerapatinam Amman koil, Pondicherry.



A decorated devaratham from Chidambaram during the festival .

and the gods. The cutting edge of the axe has to be smeared with milk, ghee and taila (til or sesame oil). The tree has to be cut one Kishku above the ground. When cutting the tree if milky sap and watery fluid comes it is auspicious. If red sap comes out it is inauspicious and the cutting has to be stopped. When the tree falls, if it produces the sound of a lion, elephant or bull it is very auspicious, the tree should fall in the east-west direction. Then the log should be cut upwards and if the outer peeling of the log does not break or scatter during its fall then it is a good omen. If the tree topples downwards with the top touching the earth and the bottom goes above the earth, or if it falls in north-south direction it is considered inauspicious. The fall of the log in any other direction is accepted. During the fall of the tree if sounds like laughter, weeping, anger or shouting is heard then it is a bad omen and the log should be rejected. The log should be covered after cutting the branches with a piece of white cloth and then taken to the rathasala. After that the shilpi cuts the tree it is carried to the "Shilpashala" (place where the shilpas are made). The logs are normally carried by the elephants or by a cart. The logs should be stored for seasoning facing east. The main trunk is used for making of the wheels, axles and

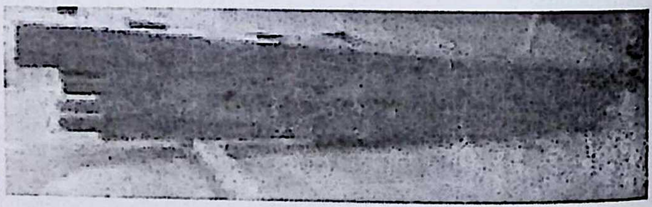
The Rathakara

The artisan skilled in making the ratham is seen to cut into the block of wood and encarve the image into it, later on it will be fixed on the ratham.

In his little world built of immortal dreams:

A semi finished panel with its peg seen above, which is used to fix it on the ratham

Even Nature's ignorance is Truth's instrument



The axle of the ratham is ready, with openings on which the wooden bars will be fixed to form the base connecting both the axles for uniform dristribution of the weigh.

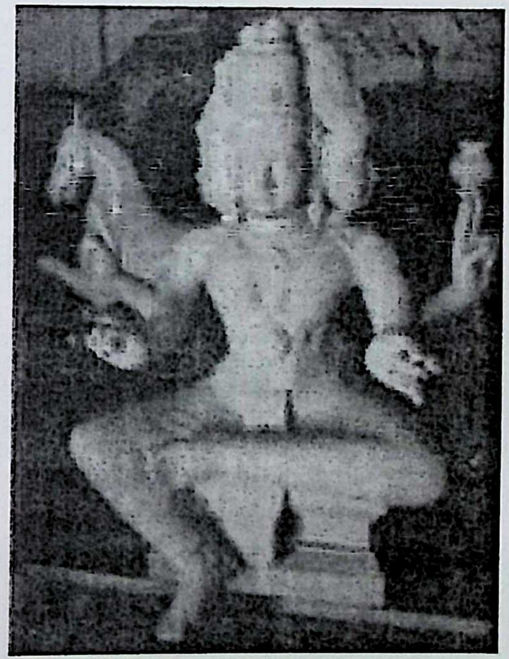
Her craft ingenious in monstrosity,

The rathakara is giving finishing touches

He carved from his own self his figure of her the sculptures. The smaller branches are used for making smaller sculptures. Thinner strips of wood are used for the making of the framework of the Vimana.

The most commonly used trees for making the temple ratham are the Illupa-maram, Vengai, Tekku, Kalimaradu and Pillaimaradu. There is a large volume of literature in the Shastras describing each of the types of wood that can be used and their salient features but presently it is out of scope to write about it in this book. The popularity of use of Illupa-maram is because of its easy availability, low cost, but also because it has got a milky secretion which does not get dry over a period of time, hence the lusture and the life of the image created on it is longer and brighter. Teak wood is also very good for carving sculptures as it is rich in its oil content and light in weight, hence lasts very long, the only disadvantage is its high cost, hence it is mostly used for the frame work of the Vimana.

An artisan fixing the joints of devaratham.

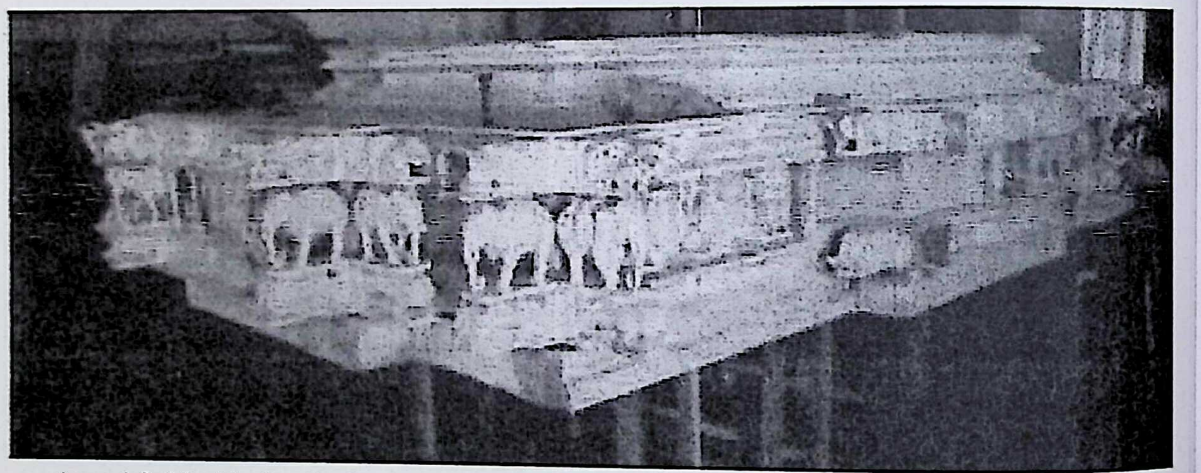


The Sarathi of the devaratham , Brahma with three faces and a horse in the background, semifinished before the final coloring with vegetable dyes

A seeing Self and potent Energy met;

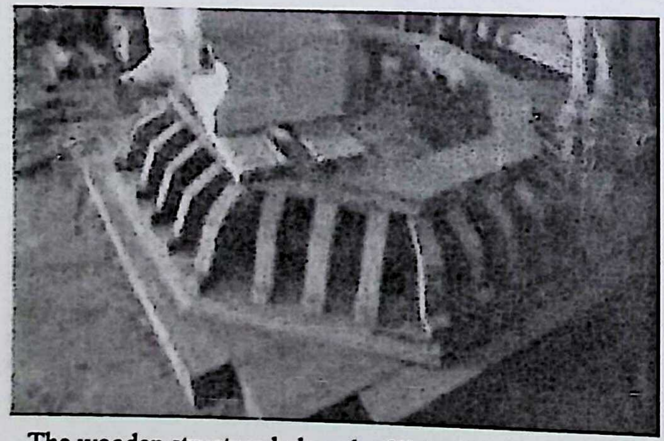
The decorative components to be fixed before the festival.

A table seemed of high Heaven's sacred code.



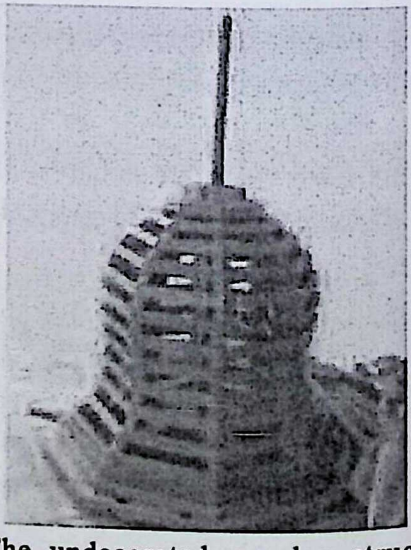
A semi finished body of a devaratham in Karaikudi with the elephant mottif and yali faces seen.

The Silence knew itself and thought took form;

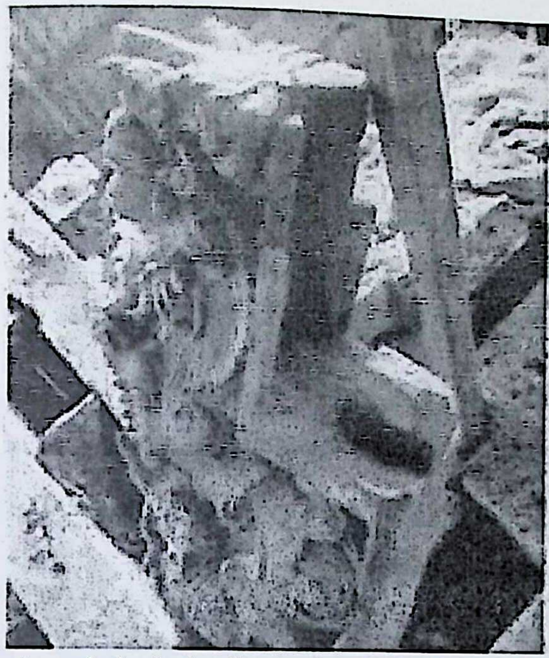


The wooden structure below the filial of the devaratham.

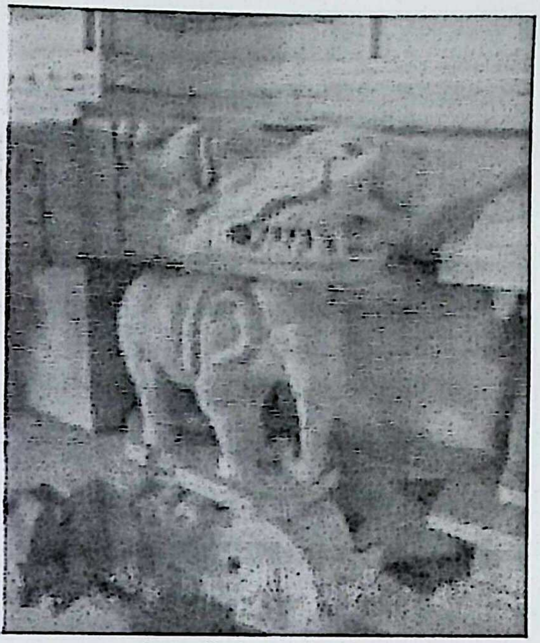
Beyond the cosmic day and cosmic night



The undecorated wooden structure forming the top of the vimana with a wooden pole to hold the kalasa and the flag.

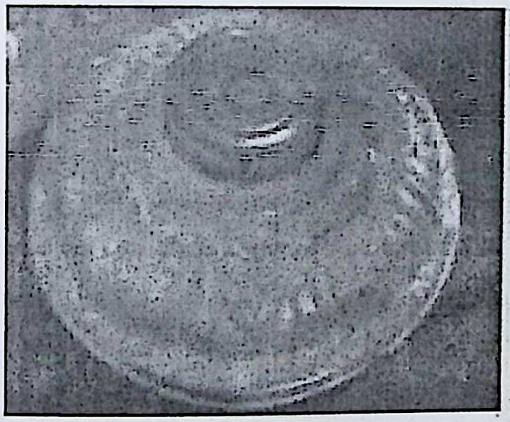


A mythological yali seen from behind.



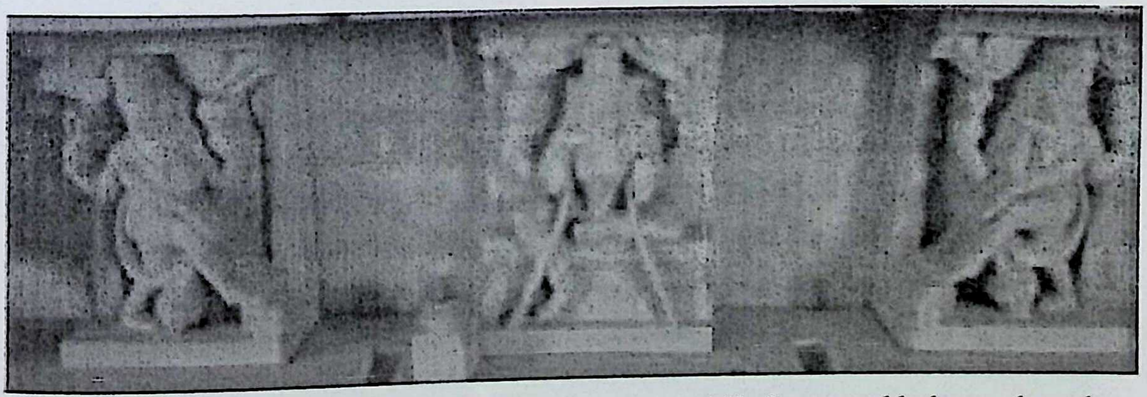
An yali above the elephant motiff.

It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,



The silver decorated structure under the filial or stupa.

Transcending Time's hours, transcending Timelessness,



The panels and figures are coated with a coat of natural meterial before vegetable dye or other colors are applied.

Ratha prathistha

The *Kumaratanta and Srilprasnashamita* describe in great detail the procedure to be followed for the consecration of the ratham to the Lord of the temple before the rathayatra. Some temples have more than one ratham as in the Shiva temple at Villianur which has one each for Ganapati, Amman and Shiva. The biggest ratham also called as the Maharatham is taken up first for cleaning followed by the other rathams. The auspicious time to start the ritual of cleaning is said to be Suklapakhya the bright half of any month (when the moon is waxing from new moon day to full moon day) of the year. It is considered to be very auspicious to commence all religious activity during the period of the waxing moon to ensure smooth conduct of the work. A yagnasala or a vedi is usually made ready right in front or to the north-west direction of the ratham. The vedi is an elevated temporary platform made from wet mud and bricks and allowed to dry. Later cow dung mixed in water is spread on top of it and after it gets dry, the surface is decorated with many beautiful designs in rice power. These are called as Kolam in Tamil and as Jhuti in Odiya, Alpana in Bengal and different names in other parts of

Offering of coconuut, betel, banana etc.
And soul fulfils its thoughts by its own power,

A devotee praying by offering lighted karpuram and prostrating before the start of the rathayatra.
Happy are men anchored on fixed belief

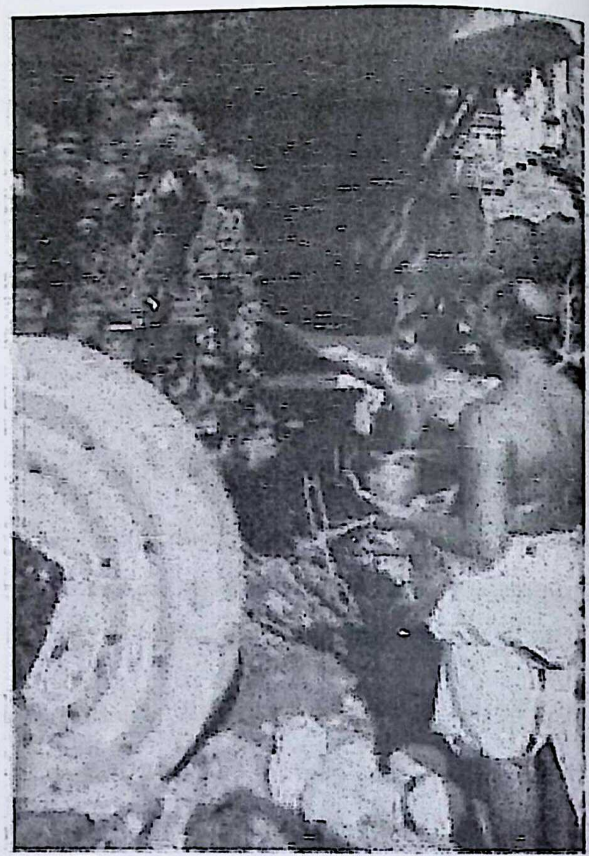
India. The Homakunda or the sacrificial pit is created on the vedi. All the four corners of the vedi is decorated with Plantain trees and all around a torana made of mango leaves is tied like a garland. After the ratham is cleaned nicely it is decorated with flower garland, mango leaves torana, plantain plants, and holy water from the temple is sprinkled on the ratham all around. Sometimes milk, ghee and curd are also used sprinkled on the ratham before the actual puja. A thick paste is made by mixing turmeric powder with water and this is used as a tikka or tilak on all the deities present on the devaratham. Similarly sandalwood tikka made from grinding a piece of sandalwood on a round sila made from stone along with few drops of water is put up on the forehead of all the major divinities present on the ratham. Vermilion or sindur tikka is also applied for all the gods and goddess on the ratham. Sometimes instead of applying these as tikka, the sindur, chandanam and haladi are made more watery and sprinkled with the mango leaves, thus covering the entire body and face instead of the forehead only. This ritual forms a part of purification process of the temple ratham so that it is ready for the virajamana of the utshavamurti. On the vedi unbroken new raw rice is placed near the Homakunda (sacrificial altar) and a new kumbha or pot is placed containing water. The number of kumbha can be one, five or nine. It is usually nine, eight of them for the eight directional gods called as Digapalikas. The central kumbha forms the main or pradhana kumbha and is dedicated to the principal deity of the temple. Each kumbha is decorated with white thread wound around it in a traditional way along with sandalwood, turmeric and vermillion tikka. The mouth of the kumbha is covered

Children playing with the vadham (Sacred rope)

A favourite of Heaven and Nature live.

A Nageswaran player

To conquer the secret treasures of the gods



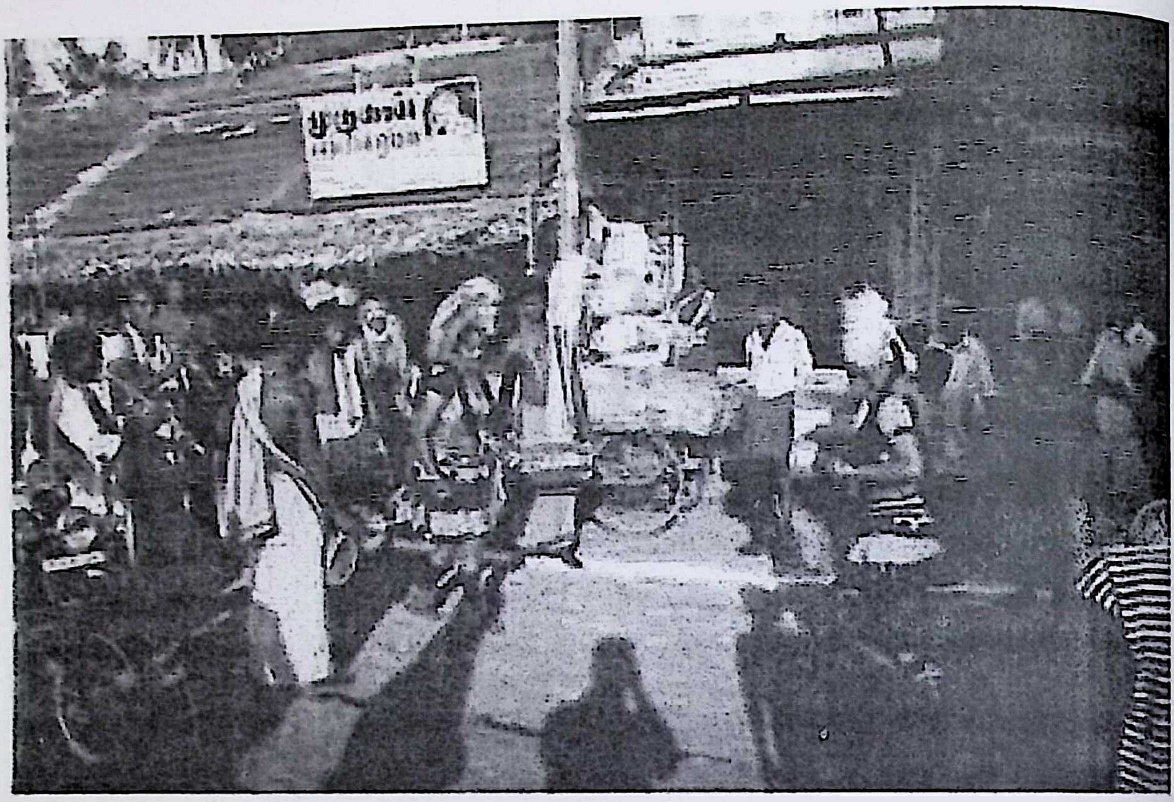
The rathaprathistha being done before the rathauthsava by the temple prist of the Narashima koil of Sengeri.

Where Mind is master of the life and form

with fresh mango leaves and a full ripe coconut is placed on it. Flower garlands, bananas and other items are also placed on the coconut or near the kumbha. After completion of the arrangements and collection of all the necessary ingredients (samagri) commencing of the puja is done by kindling fire on the Homakunda. The birth ceremony or jatkamali is first conducted. Homa is an offering or oblation to the god or goddesses by pouring ghee (clarified butter) into the sacrificial fire while chanting appropriate slokas from the sacred texts. Hence many roots and branches of plants which are considered auspicious for the occasion are also offered in the sacrificial fire during the homa. Some of these are Palasam, Samyam, Udubaram, Apamargam, Vata and Kusha. During the puja cooked rice, priyagu a creeper, skandha mulam an edible root, gingly oil and a verity of fruits like ripe banana, coconut, orange, mango are placed on the fire in the Homakunda as an offering to the lord. Lord Vishnu in the form of Vasudeva is appropriated to protect the homa as well the ratham. This is also called as Raksyabandhana – to invoke the lord to protect all on the ratham. Rakhya is to protect, bandhanam is to embrace or to tie or create a bond together. Then the main deity is invoked and is offered puja in the pradhana kumbha. Similarly all the Digapalikas or directional gods are invoked and each of them are invoked and worshipped in the eight kumbhas so that they protect as well as shower blessings on all during the rathayatra. Next Anirudha who forms a part of lord Vishnu is worshipped. The cooked rice with pulses called Caru is divided into 28 parts and offered into the homa to the various gods and goddesses. The ladle used to pour ghee made from wood with one end shaped like a spoon is called as samidhi. At the end of the pooja poorna-ahuti is offered and the oblation must be kept on the pradhana kumbha before being placed on to the fire in the Homakunda, all along reciting the Purusha-sukta mantra (a mantra from the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda). At the end of this the homa is complete and the fire is extinguished by the Shanti homa by pouring fresh milk on to the fire while reciting Om Shanthi three times. This is to establish peaceful

Devotees receiving the vibhuti from the priest on the ratham .

Happiest who stand on faith as on a rock.



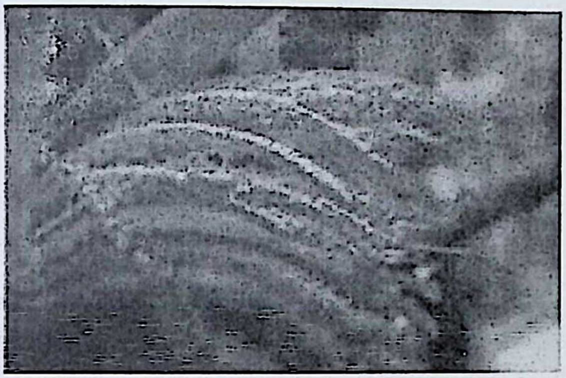
Folk dance, Thirukameshwara ratha festival at Villianur.

The rhythm and music heard that built the worlds,

Offering the white gourd(water gourd) at the wheel of the ratham of Kamachiamman kovil, Puducherry.

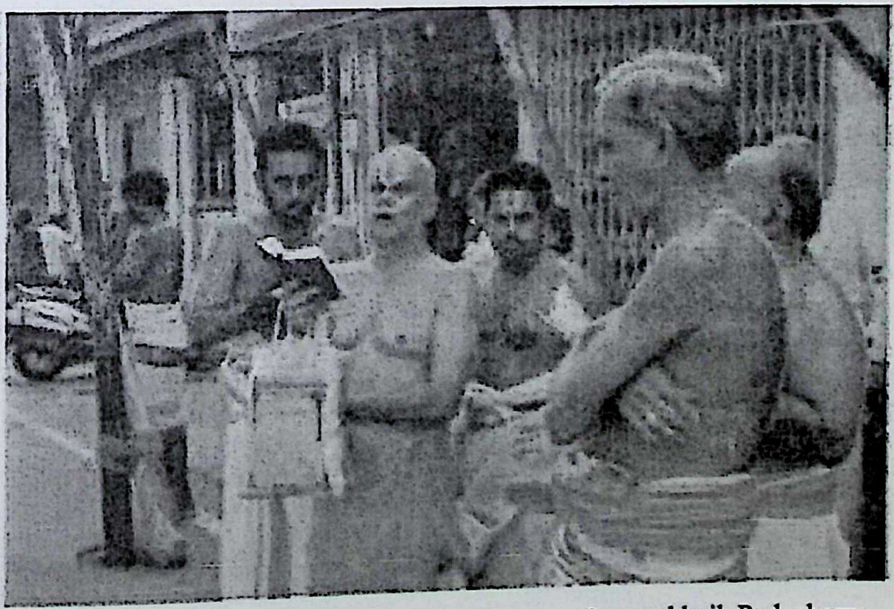
Carrying the unbroken thread old lives have spun.
Compressing Nature into a formula;

completion of the pooja. Now the pradhana kumbha containing the water with all the power imbibed during the homa is taken by the priest and sprinkled on the Kalasa and is called as Abhishekam. The Kalasa is then hoisted on to the top of the ratham and installed. The acharya also sprinkles the water present in the eight kumbhas in the eight directions of the ratham on the eight gods installed on the temple ratham. He usually recites the pranabha mantra Om (Om is considered as the root mantra of all the mantras and is self-contained) while sprinkling the water from the kumbha. After this the various gods and goddesses are installed at their respective places on the ratham. The Shankha (conch), Padma (lotus) and chakra (disc) form the personified symbols of Lord Vishnu and is installed on the Bramhasana. The kumudhodimurti – which forms the Kumudha and seven other celestial elephants are installed on the eight directions of the ratham around the Devasana (Deva-asana). The astha Digapalikas are installed on the eight directions around the ratham at the



Offering of the coconut flowers to Kamachiamman on the ratham for posperity

Far richer in their sweet and nectarous sap



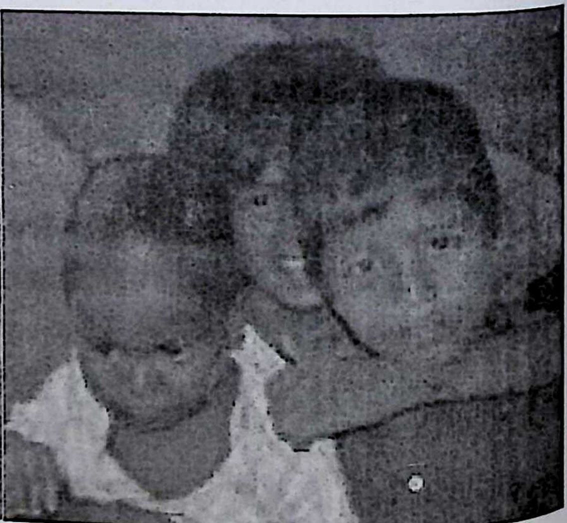
Chanting from the scriptures before the rathayatra , Perumal koil, Puducherry.

Thus streamed down from the realm of early Light

Manusyanasana. The Dharmatthi devatas are the devatas who preserve Dharma and are installed on the pillars of the ratham. They are the personified principles of lords of dharma (the sacred principle of Truth), artha (principle of wealth), Karma (principle of work) and Moksha (principle of liberation). The adhakasaja and eight other murti forms of Lord Vishnu to include Keshava, Madhusudhana, Trivikarma, Sridhara, Vamana, Hrishikesha, Padmanabha and Damodara are installed in the third tier of the ratham. The Dasavatara panel of Lord Vishnu is installed on the second tier of the ratham both in front and back. The chatur vamshi forms of Lord Vishnu are installed in the first tier of the ratham. In the corners of the temple ratham the following gods are installed, Lord Indra on the right wheels, Adharashakti in the axles, Gajam or Aryabhatta on the Upapitha, Seshanaga above the Upapitha, Narashakti and Karthikeya in the base of the Devasana. The vidyadharas are attached to the front and sides as the rathapathis of the devaratham. Similarly it is Garuda the vahana of Vishnu that is seen on the Dhwaja (flag) atop the ratham. The above description applies to most of the temple rathams dedicated to lord Vishnu. The arrangement differs in case of rathams dedicated to Vinayaga, Amman and Shiva. Some describe that Maya is installed in the axles, Surya and Chandra as the wheels, the Vedas as the horses, Lord Brahma or Brahmi as the charioteer is seated on the projected platform holding the reins of the horses. On completion of the installation of all the gods and goddess on the ratham, the pradhana Acharya and his team along with the sthapati or rathakara receive Dana and Dakhina (donation in form of money and material things like clothes, rice, fruits,

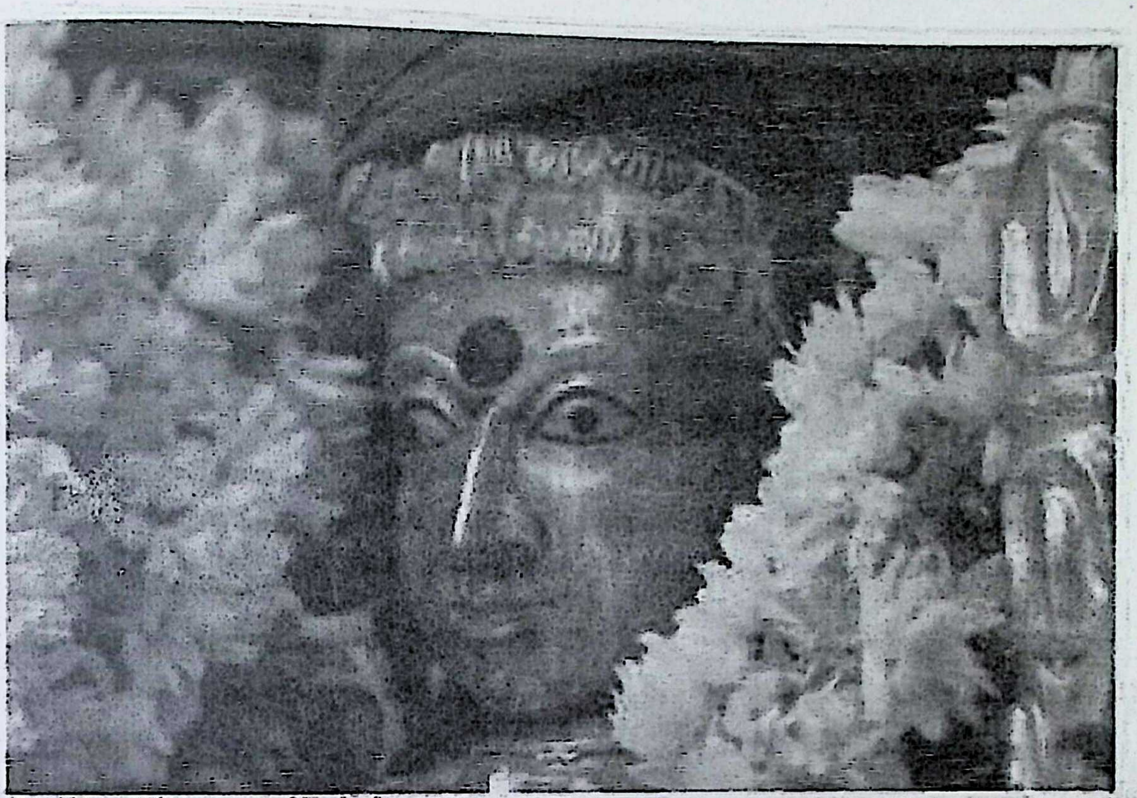
Puja items on the ratham

And the endless possibility that lurked



Children enjoying on the ratham

Yet all it does is on an infant's scale,



Devi Kamatchiamman of Puducherry

Forced the world's blind immensity to sight.

Playing the trumpet (photo by Singaravelu)

Earth's grain that needs the sap of pleasure and tears

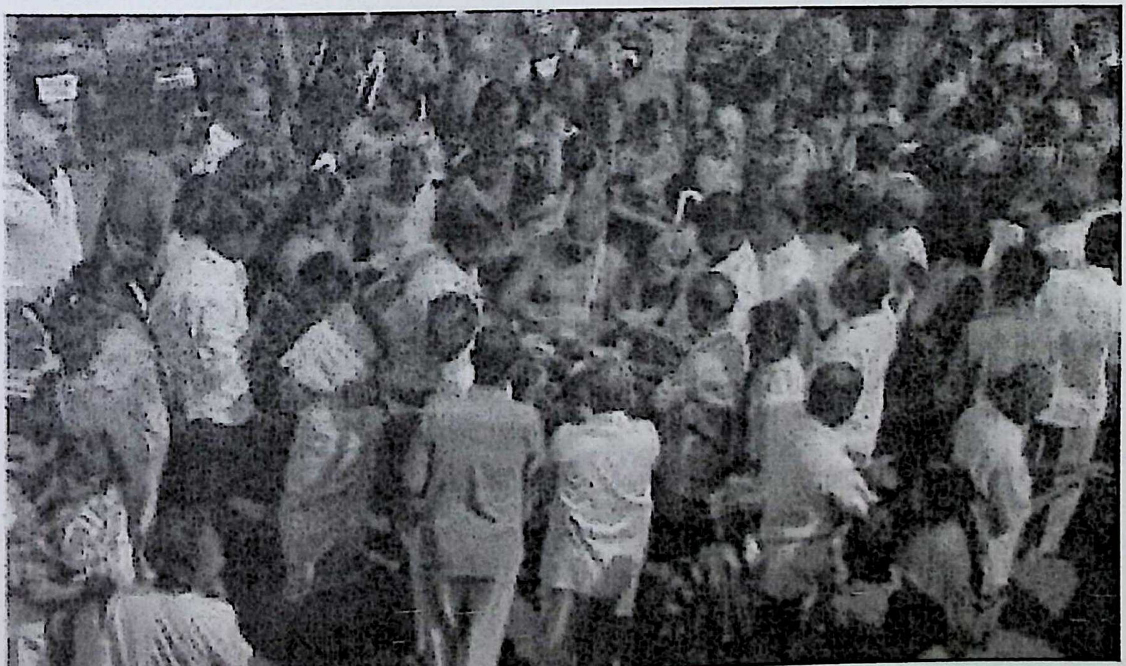
Playing the Mridangam during the rathaushtava

And still to the listening soul on mortal earth vegetables etc) from the temple management and the well-wishers present. This is followed by a Prasad (food offered to the lord during the homa and puja) sevanam and bhojanam – offering of cooked food in form of regular rice, sambar, vegetables, fruits, payasam etc to all those present including the priests, sthapatis, pilgrims, devotes and others. Thus the installation ceremony of ratham is over and it is ready for use for the festival of rathayatra.

Ratha uthsava and Rathayatra

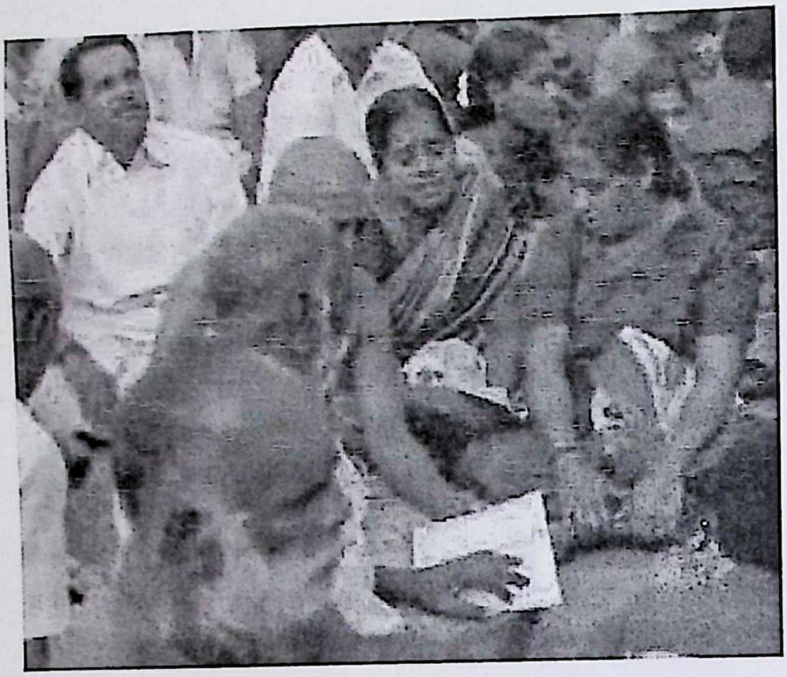
The temple car festival is closely linked with the rituals and festivals of the temple. A typical Hindu temple has several pooja and festivals celebrated throughout the year. The daily pooja is called "Nityapuja" and is done every day from early morning to late night. The simplest of the puja is the offering of dhoopa- deepa- Naivedya (incense – lighted lamp – ghee and eatable items) to the lord.

Early in the morning the lord is given his "Asana" (a seat). This is followed by "Awahana" of the lord, invoking the presence of the lord into the image. This is followed by "Stapana" or consecration of the lords presence into the image (The Divine Spirit in to the Image). The lords feet and hands are washed followed by holy bath and then "Bastra-vesha" or dressing up the lord with clothes. The lord is then decorated with chandanam, sindura,



The festival of rathayatra of Lord Perumal, MG road Puducherry

A new degree of wonder and of bliss,



pushpamala or flower garland, etc. All through this period the relevant slokas from the scriptures are chanted. This is followed by offering of dhoopa (incense), deepa (lighted lamp), Naivedya and abhisheka. In some temples (particularly in the "Kali" temples) additional rites include "baali" or sacrifice, which may be vegetables like white gourd or animals like hen, goat etc.

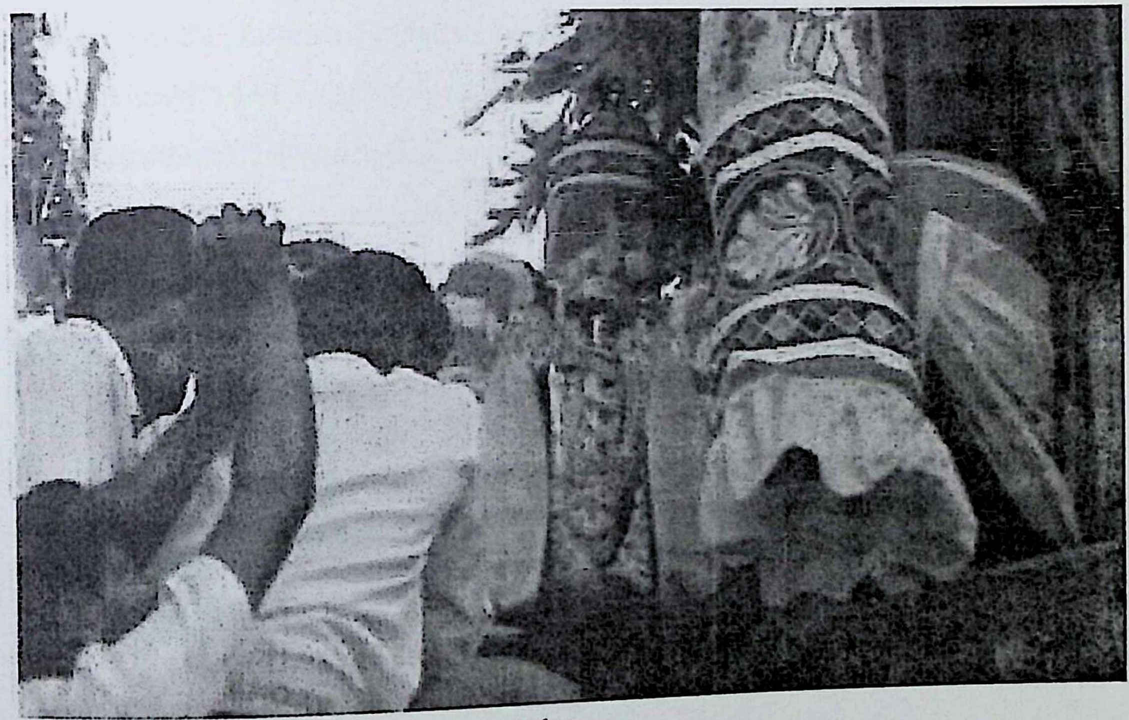
This early morning puja is called Sakala puja or Sakala dhoopa or prathakala puja (early morning). It is offered first thing at dawn at the time of sunrise. Similar puja is conducted in the noon and is called Madhyana puja. In larger temples (like Jaganath temple at Puri and Shiva Lingaraj temple in Bhubaneswar) food like rice, dal, vegetables, sweets and payasam are offered to the lord daily. This Prasad is distributed to the pilgrims and devotes after the puja. Late afternoon puja called aparanha-puja is held around 4pm and "Sandhya puja" is held at the time of sunset. During these times snacks items like laddu, murukku etc are offered to the lord. In the night the last puja called "ratri puja" is done, at the end of which the lord is supposed to retire for the night.

All the above mentioned pujas are also conducted exactly in the same way on the ratham during the ratha-uthsava.

There are several festivals through out the year, some are monthly and some are yearly. There are certain festivals celebrated only once in a year and are called as "Mahausthava", as they are grand festivals both in style and duration. They are also called Brahma-ustava and are supposed to have been started by Lord Brahma. Some of the popular grand festivals are Rama-navami, Janmastami or Krishna Jayanti, Deepavali, Mahasankaranti, Shivaratri, Chittra Pournami, Jaganath Rathayatra, etc. There are even super grand festivals conducted once in several years (anything between 8 to 20 years) like the Kumbhamela, Nabakalabera of Lord Jaganath and Mahamaham of Kumbakonam. During these festivals more than a million people participate in the festival and the area covered by the festival is large.

Ratha-uthsava is the temple chariot festival and rathayatra is the pulling of the ratham on the occasion of the festival. The Brahmausthava is celebrated over several days including festivals like dhawaja puja, arcane (germination of seeds), Sayanausthava – sleeping festival, Thiruvarai – bathing festival, Dollausthava – the swing festival and the ratha-uthsava. In most places the zenith of the entire festival activity end with the rathayatra when the lord travels on the ratham. This is held at the end of the Brhmausthava.

The ratha-uthsava is celebrated with great pomp and gaiety. People from near and far come to the festival with family and friends. In the beginning, the ratham is made ready by cleaning and consecrating it to the lord by the ratha prathistha as described in the Shastras (Kumaratanta). After the ratham is ready for the lord – decorative horses made from wood are attached to the front of the ratham. Lord Brahma is seated holding the reins of the horses. Vasuki is supposed to be coiled from front to back of the ratham to provide stability and prevent the ratham from disintegration during the festival. Then the Utshavamurti of the god or



The utshavamurti being carried on to the ratham .

goddess is brought to the ratham in procession and installed on it amidst chanting of mantras. This is called Deva prathistha on the ratham. All the puja and rituals observed inside the temple during the day are conducted on the ratham.

Most of the devarathams are drawn by thick ropes tied around the ratham. These ropes are extra large and specially made for rathayatra. They are stored in the ratha mandapa after the festival. In a small ratham iron chains may be used instead of the rope. A large drum is placed on the ratham and used during the rathayatra. The rhythmic sound from the drum is an indication for the devotes to pull the ratham with all their strength so that the ratham moves forward along the teir-theru (car street) smoothly. As most of the ratham wheels are made from wood the street on which the ratham moves (teir-theru) should to be firm, otherwise the ratham can get stuck.

In a typical rathayatra, the ratham can move straight by uniform pull from the front. Whenever the ratham moves slowly or gets stuck on the path, to free the back wheels "tadi" is applied from behind. Tadi is a long log of wood, the tip is shaped to fit the width of the wheel and this is placed between the wheel and the ground. At least six to ten persons stand on the tadi lengthwise to free the wheel from the ground when needed. When the ratham is pulled, it acts

The rathayatra of Lord Narasimha, Sengerikovil, Abhisekapakam.

like a lever freeing the back wheels to move forward. In most of the rathams there is no brake to control the forward movement, hence wooden blocks shaped to fit the width of the wheel with handle to hold it called "Kudil " is applied on the front wheels as the ratham starts moving. Thus with people in front pulling the ratham and few people applying "tadi" behind and "Kudil" in front of the wheels, makes the journey of the ratham smooth and safe. Some of the rathams are fitted with hydraulic brakes provided by BHEL (Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited – A Government of India enterprise). Trained persons from the government accompany the ratham during the rathayatra to control the brake system.

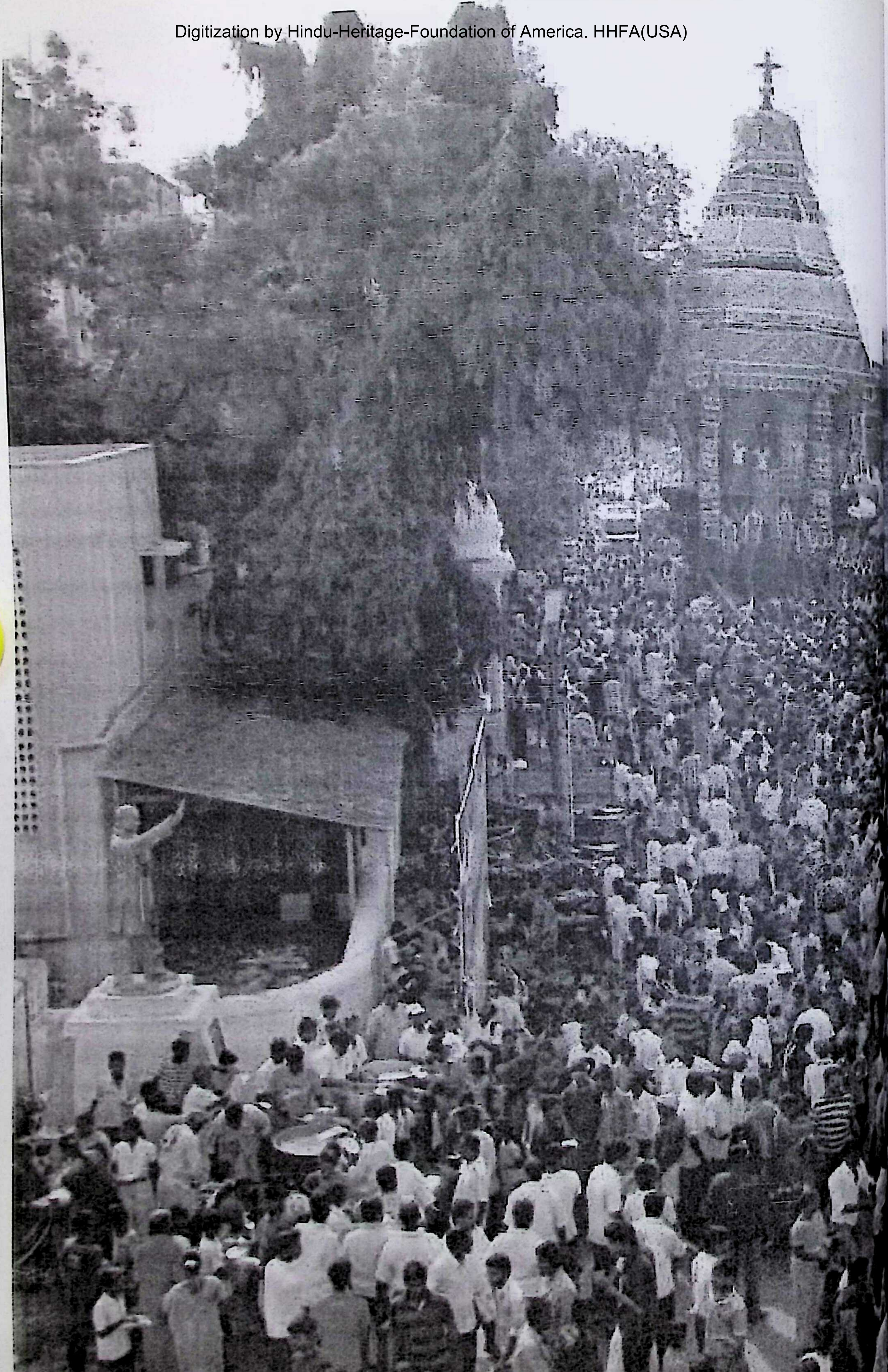
When the ratham has to turn at corners innovative method are used. In the front the ropes are divided to two sections, if the ratham has to turn right then one set of people pulls the ropes straight and majority of the people on the other section pull it to the right. Similarly tadi is applied only on the left wheels. In this way the ratham turns to the right smoothly, then again the ropes are straightened and pulled for straight stretch of the yatra.

In case of very small temple rathams like the golden and silver rathams few people are needed to take it around the streets, but the same principle as mentioned above is followed.

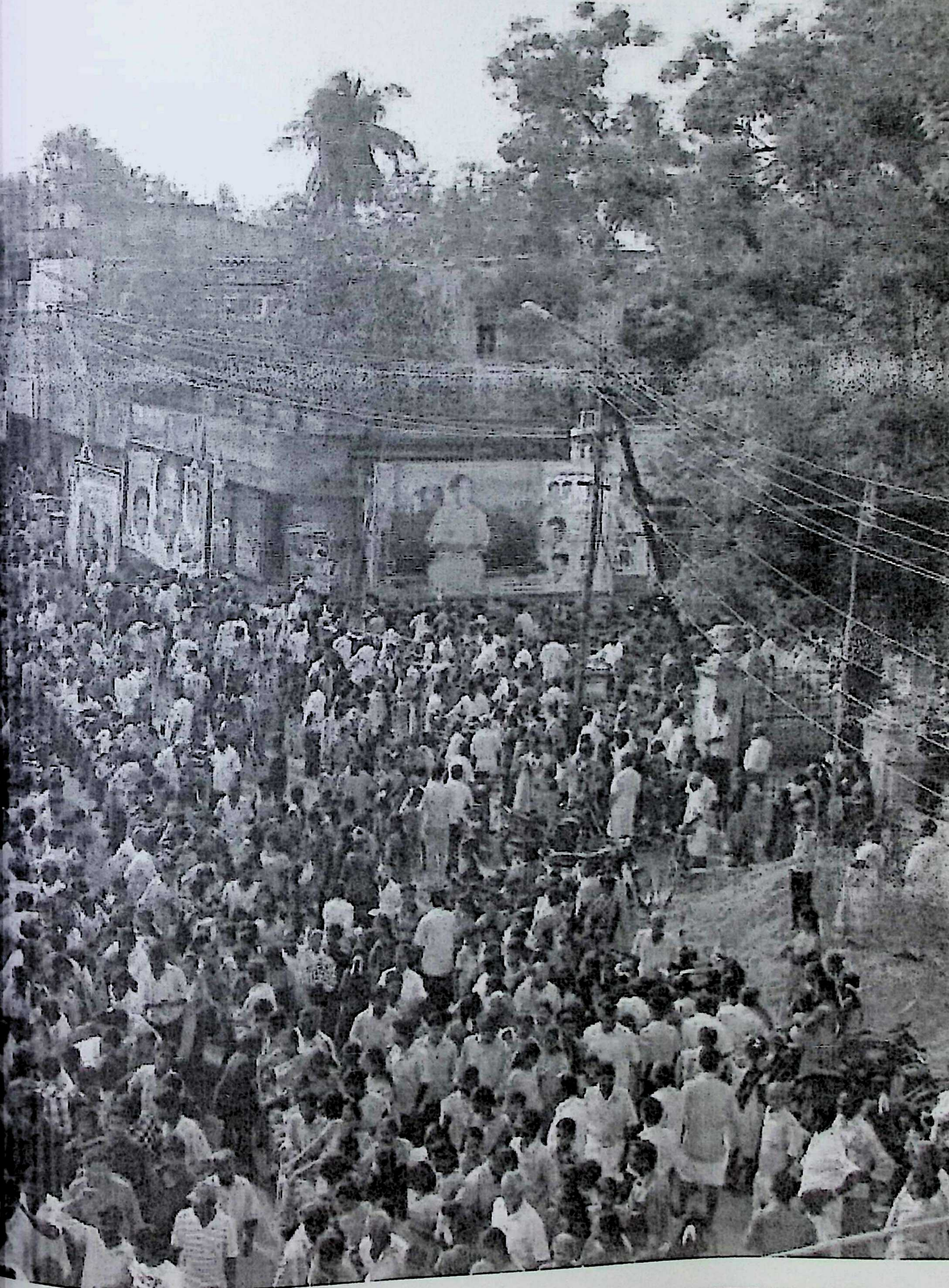
Social Implications

Most of the rathaushtava and the rathayatra are secular event in the society. People from all castes, from near and far participate in the festival. Being in a festive mood people rejoice and meet friends and relatives. Pulling the rope of the holy devaratham is said to purify the person from all impurities of body and mind. Devadasis dance in front of the Lord as the procession moves. Young village lads show different acrobatics. People sing in praise of the Lord and play drums, cymbals, flute, bells etc. As the ratham moves along the street, devotes offer fruits, sweets, coconut, plantains, beetle nut, flowers, karpuram, etc to the Lord. Some devotes even offer food like sweets, pongal, fruits, buttermilk, etc for the other devotes, pilgrims and poor people.

This ratha-uthsava is unique as people from all walks of life, rich and poor, all castes, from rural and urban areas, young and old mingle together. It is an occasion of social harmony and gathering. In some of these festivals particular communities may be given specific duties to perform, like the rathakara to check the wheels and carry out minor repairs before the

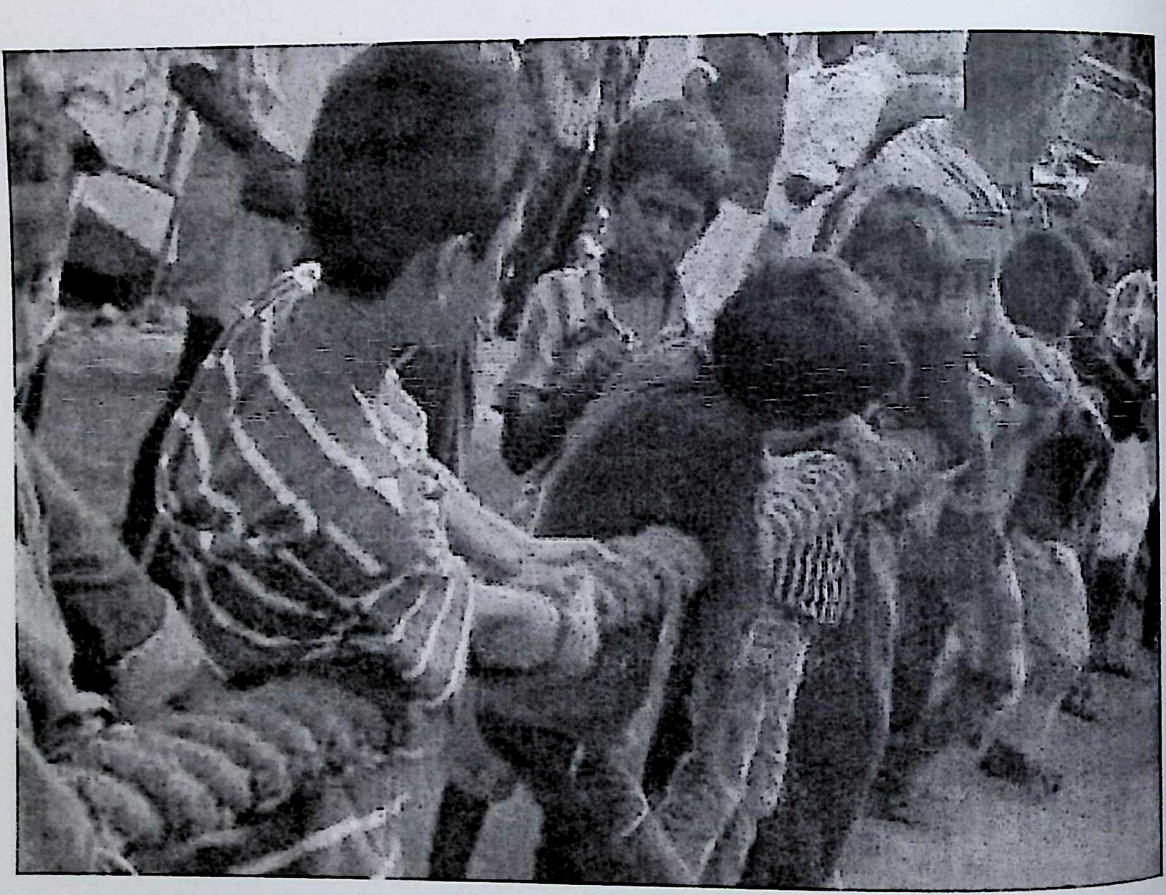


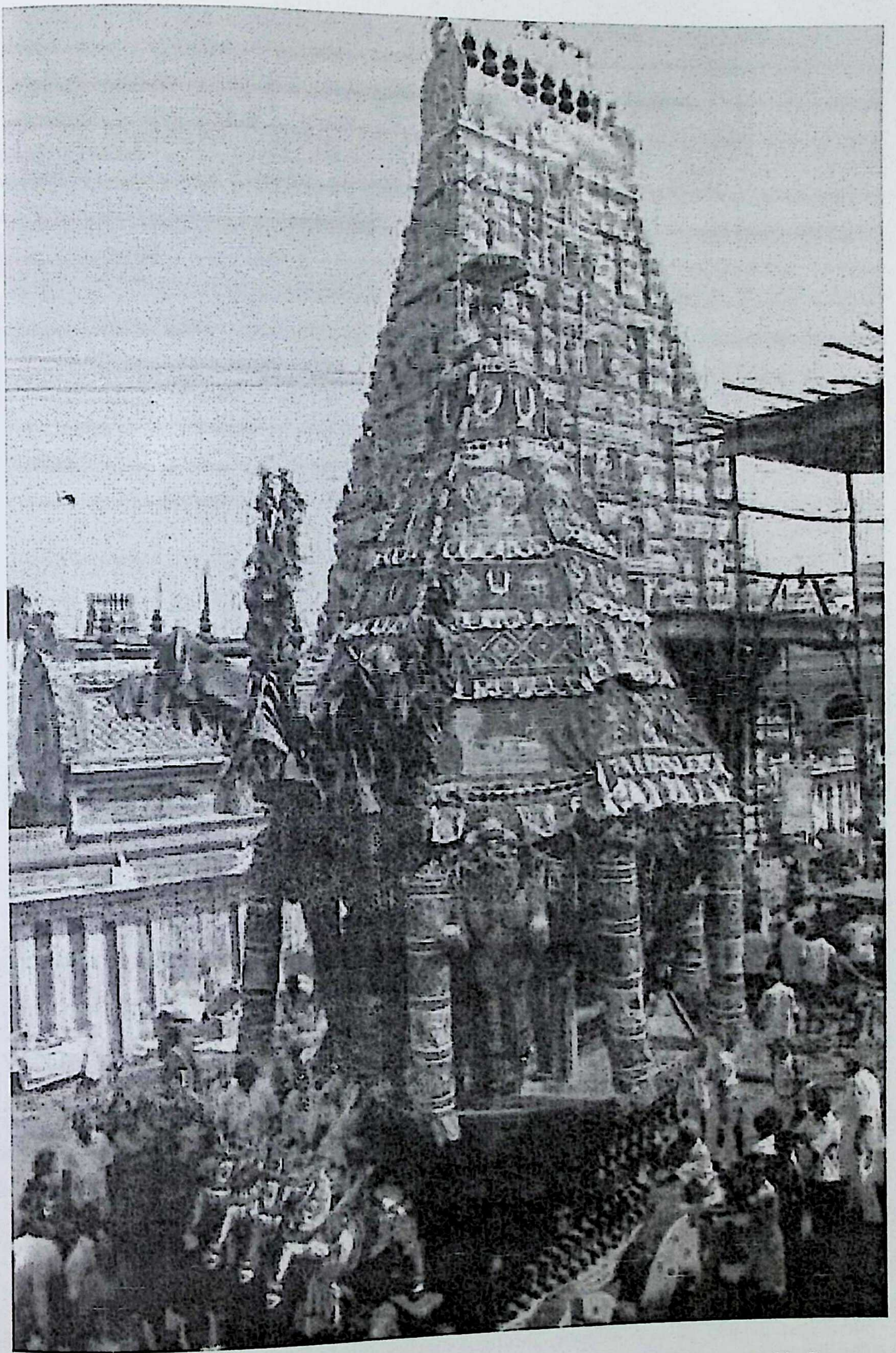
The rathauthsava of Thirukamaswara, Villianur.(photo by Sri Singaravelu)
It was the hour before the Gods awake. Across the path of the divine Event



rathayatra, cleaning of the ratham, use of tadi and Kudil, beating of the drum, etc are given to specific community as an vamsha parampara.

During the festival there is usually a mela or fair with a temporary market near the temple. All sorts of goods are sold during the festival days and it gives a good opportunity for the artisans from near and far off villages to come to buy and sell their goods. So we see toys, flower, sweets, other eatables, household items, pots etc being sold. At some of these festivals make shift stages are made and both musical, dance and drama programs are held for the entertainment of the people visiting the rathayatra.





Perumal koil and the devaratham

The Timeless made accountable to Time and valued the incommensurable Supreme.

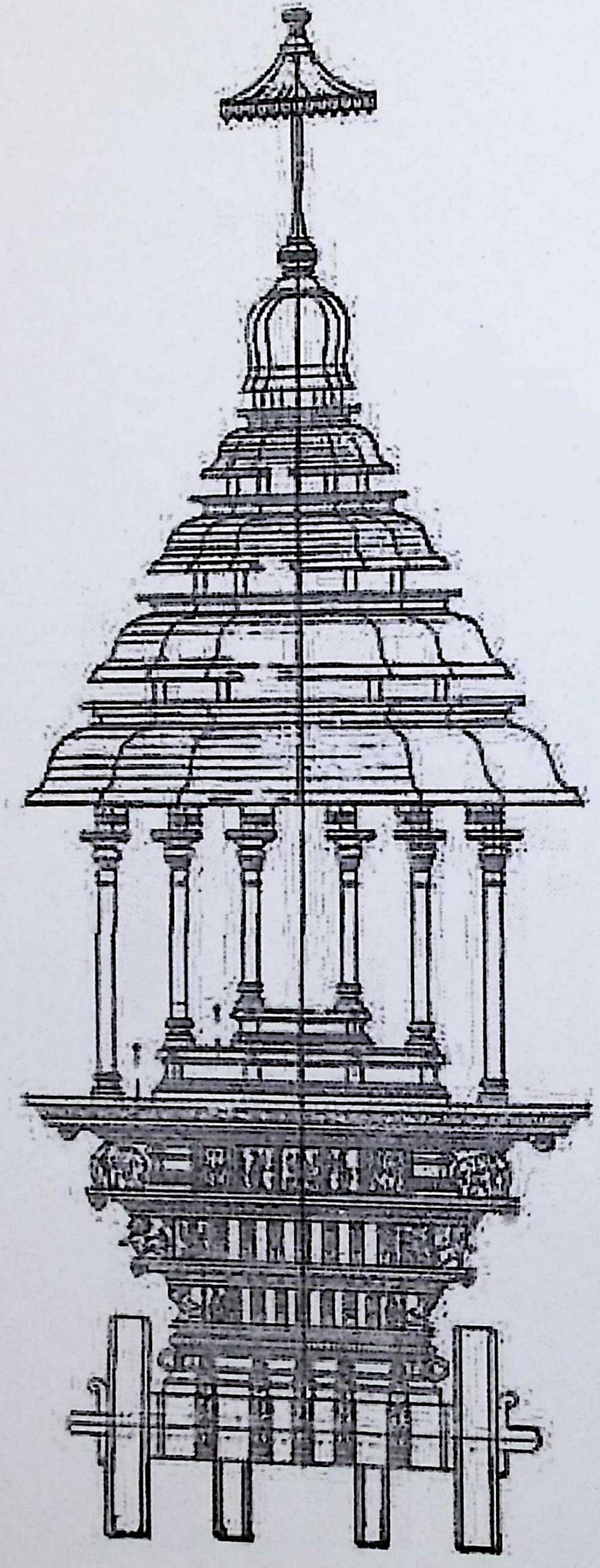


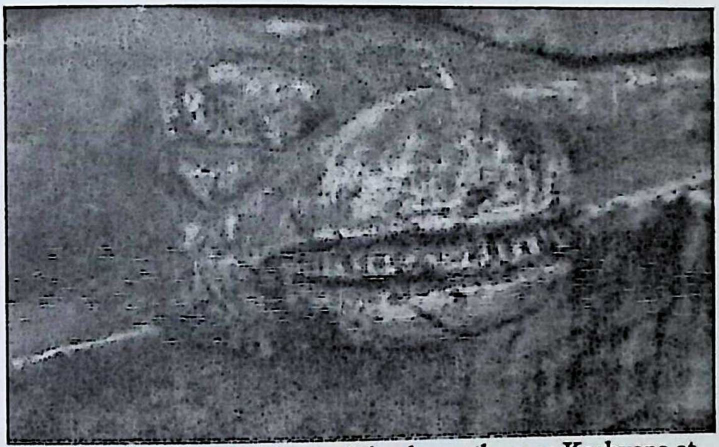
Figure 21

A complete devaratham with inner wheels, axle, ani, bhootapar, rings for rope, simhapar, pudalaipar, gajapar, yalis, simhasana, decorated vimana, kalasa, dwajasthamba, gods and goddess in the nitches.

Chapter - VI

The Arrangement of Images on the Ratham

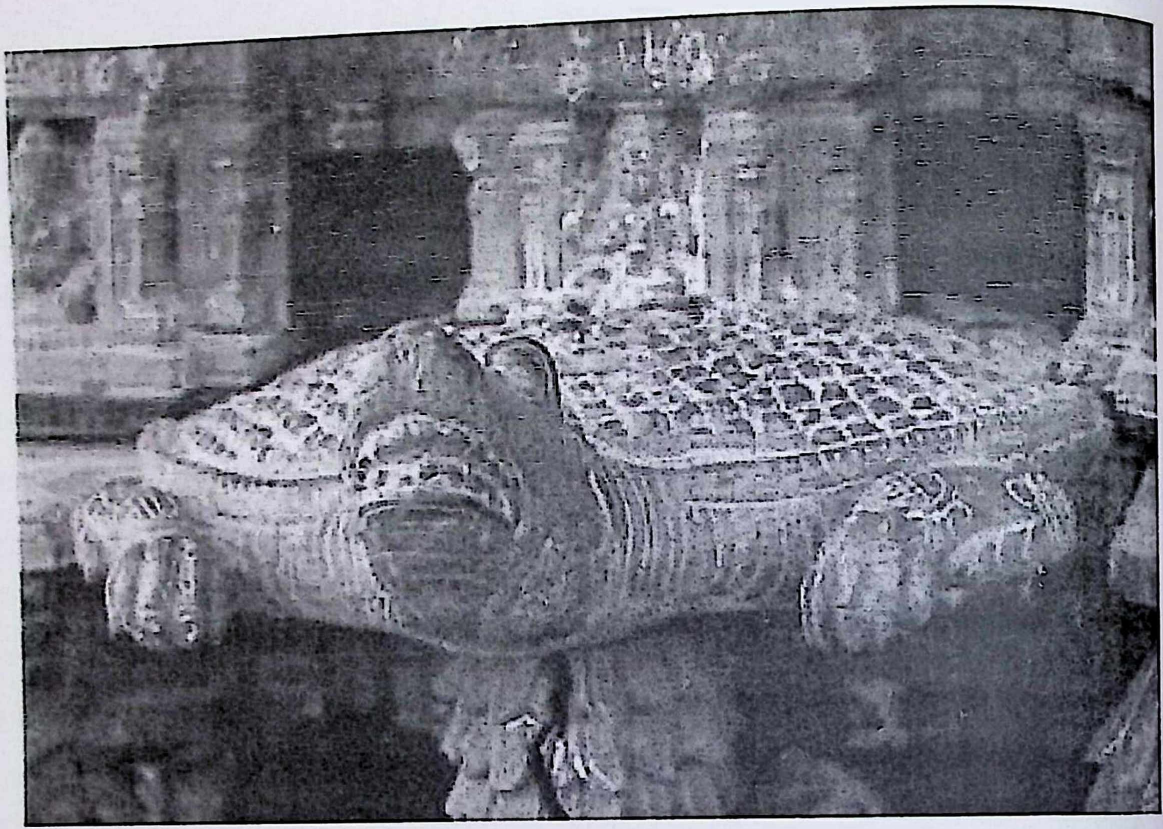
The classical devaratham have the following parts from top to bottom, the crown or vimana, the decorated body, the Upapidam or Uppidam, the irusukkottai or the wheels and axle complex. The main parts of the body are the Adhisthana, Pada and Devasana which are again classified into different groups according the types of images depicted on them. As one observes from below upwards we see the Bhootappar, Sellappar, Saram thangaippar, Nettippar, Nattukkam, Poodalaippar, Singhappar and Kajappaippar, Dalavarisaippar, Devasam and Simhasanam.



Lord Vishnu at the base of the devaratham as Kashyapa at RameswaramTamilnadu.

They who have looked on me, shall grieve no more

At the base of the devaratham we always have five wooden bars forming the framework placed on the axle. The projections of these bars are covered by the decorative bhootagana or Shiva gana. These symbolically represent the five elements of nature: the earth, fire, water, air and ether. Every perceptible material world is made up of combination of the pancha tatwa or five primary elements. These are represented as Shiva gana as Shiva is the master of them and have conquered them. The asuras, bhoota, ghost, pretas, pisachas, nagas and other beings of the neither world worship Shiva as he is their master. They are called as bhootagana and thus they are placed at the lowest part of the devaratham called as Bhootappar .These may be male or female and usually have a pot belly and round face, sometimes blowing a trumpet or dancing or holding draggers etc. In the Shiva temples we can see these Shiva gana in a single row all around the base of the vimana. **The ratha mookha** or the face of the ratham has interesting features. There is an extended platform for the colorfully decorated horses to be tied and fixed during the festival time. They are in galloping posture and their reign is in the hands of the



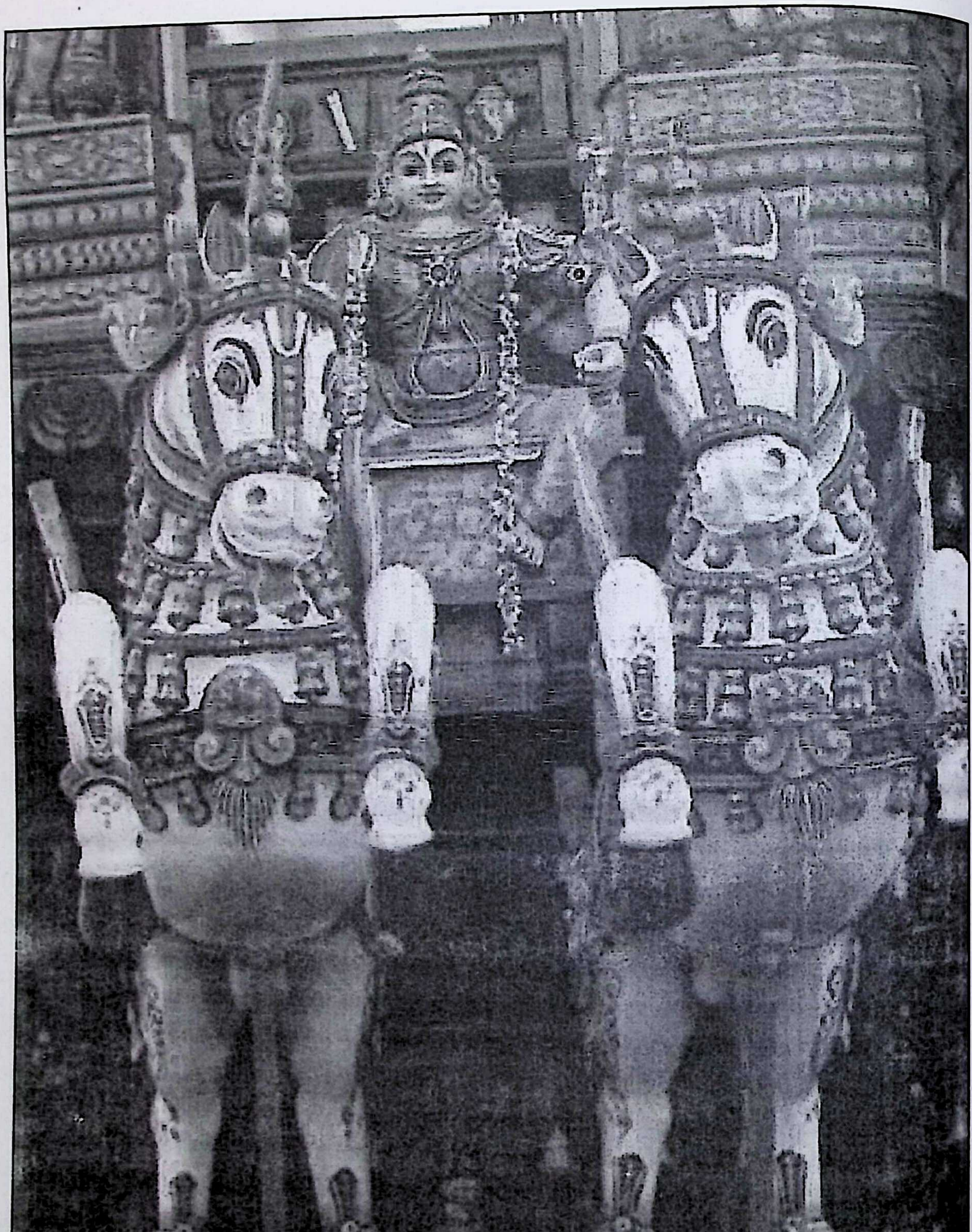
The Divine Tortoise : Vishnu as the divine tortoise is always placed at the base of the ratham just above the panchabhoot panel. He is the Adhara of the ratham as it is he who gives the support from below to the entire ratham symbolically during its dynamic and static state.

All powers were woven in countless concords here

Sarathi of the ratham. These horses are removed after the festival and repainted periodically. A special seat on a small extended platform is made for the Sarathi to be seated and symbolically hold the reigns of the ratham. The Sarathi is usually Brahma or his counter part Brahmi with three faces, one in front and two on the sides, the fourth is supposed to be on the back which is usually never carved. This image of Sarathi is also very much multi colored and removed after the festival for safe keeping. The Sarathi holds a whip on the right hand and the reins on the left hand. Symbolically it is Lord Brahma the creator of the universe who guides the ratham in its journey to reach safely the destination. Lord Brahma leads the individual in its journey of life to its goal, into the abode of finding the soul and the divine residing in the core of our being. Then right at the centre of the ratha mookha we have a giant tortoise just above the Bhootappar, behind the Sarathi. This is the symbolic representation of the Kashyapa avatar or the tortoise incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The tortoise has a very hard back with a very soft inner part and the hard back is tough to withstand stress and thus adaptable to land and water conditions. It is very steady in its movements and has a very long life on earth. Thus it is Vishnu the preservator, who supports the entire ratham during its journey of the rathayatra from the beginning till the end. He prevents any mishap and provides all strength and stability to the ratham during its static and kinetic state (stationary and moving state)

Young Brahma as the sarathi of the Veerapatinam devaratham.

One leans to earth,the other yearns to the skies:



The sarathi of the Perumal koil devaratham seated on the extended platform holding the reigns of the celestial horses (pure white) appearing to gallop with Vasuki at the base.

Symbolically it is lord Vishnu who provides us the strength and stability to go forward in our journey of life. Just remembering the Lord, he prevents any accident or deviation from our goal during the journey. So it is very important to remember the Lord in all states of wakefulness or action and sleep, meditation, or inaction.

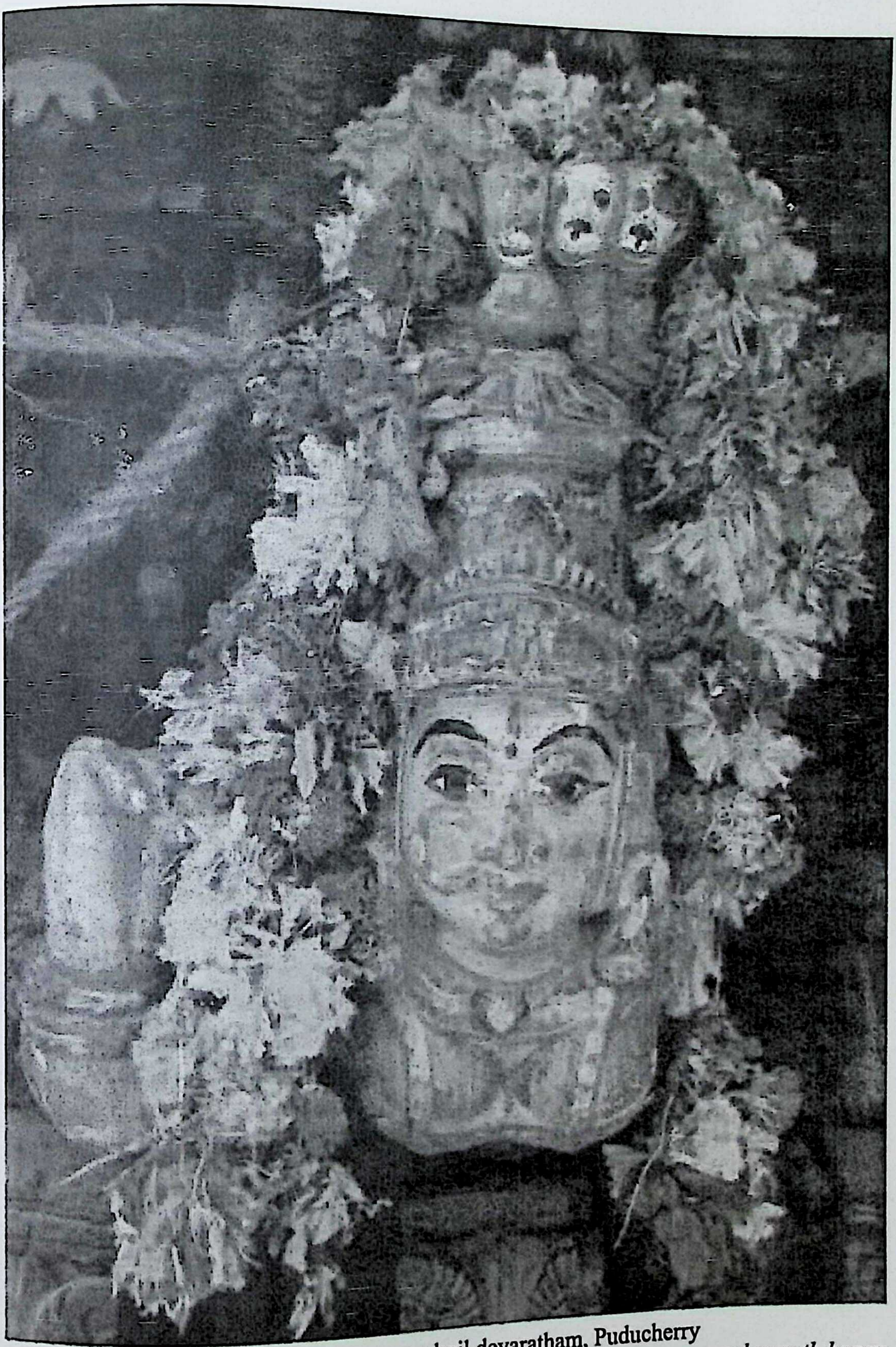
The Layers of the ratham:

The first and the lowest layer is the **Bhootappar** which has the bhootagana or shivagana on the protrusion or the ends of the bars, always five in number placed directly over the axles of the ratham. The next is the **Sellappar** which forms the bars above the Bhootappar and parallel to the axle which is invisible and supports the frame above. The next layer is the **Saranthangaippar or chandramkandappar** connecting the front and the back of the Bhootappar on the outside and is visible. The next layer is the **Nattukkam** which supports the axle placed above the Saranthangaippar. The next layer is the framework above the Nattukkam called as the **Ashrandappar or Khudarai** or the Poothalaippar and at the corners of the ratham has the horse motifs. The inner structures are not visible from outside except the horse motif, the yalis and other figures. The next layer is similarly called **Singhappar** which forms the next framework with the Lion motifs in the corners and many decorative panels. The next layer is called **Kajapaippar** and has the elephant motifs at the corners and is invisible from outside. It is covered by many panels telling stories from the epics and the scriptures. The next layer is called **Dalavarisaippar** and has panels mostly of the gods and goddess which are seen from outside. The framework is invisible and supports the platform above and is connected to the layer below. The next layer is the **Devasam** which is above the platform at the centre and has the images of Prakriti or Shakti or Ashtalakshmi on all the four sides. The last is the **Simhasanam** or the Lion throne for the Divine, where the Uthsava murti of the main deity from the temple is placed during the rathaushtava and rathayatra.

The smaller devarathams like the Cattateir, Velliteir and Thanga ratham have very simple Upapitha, Pada and Simhasana with minimum or no panels. Only few ornamental decorations are there. In the bigger rathams all the parts of Upapitha, Pada and Simhasana are filled with several tiers, each tier has several carved panels.

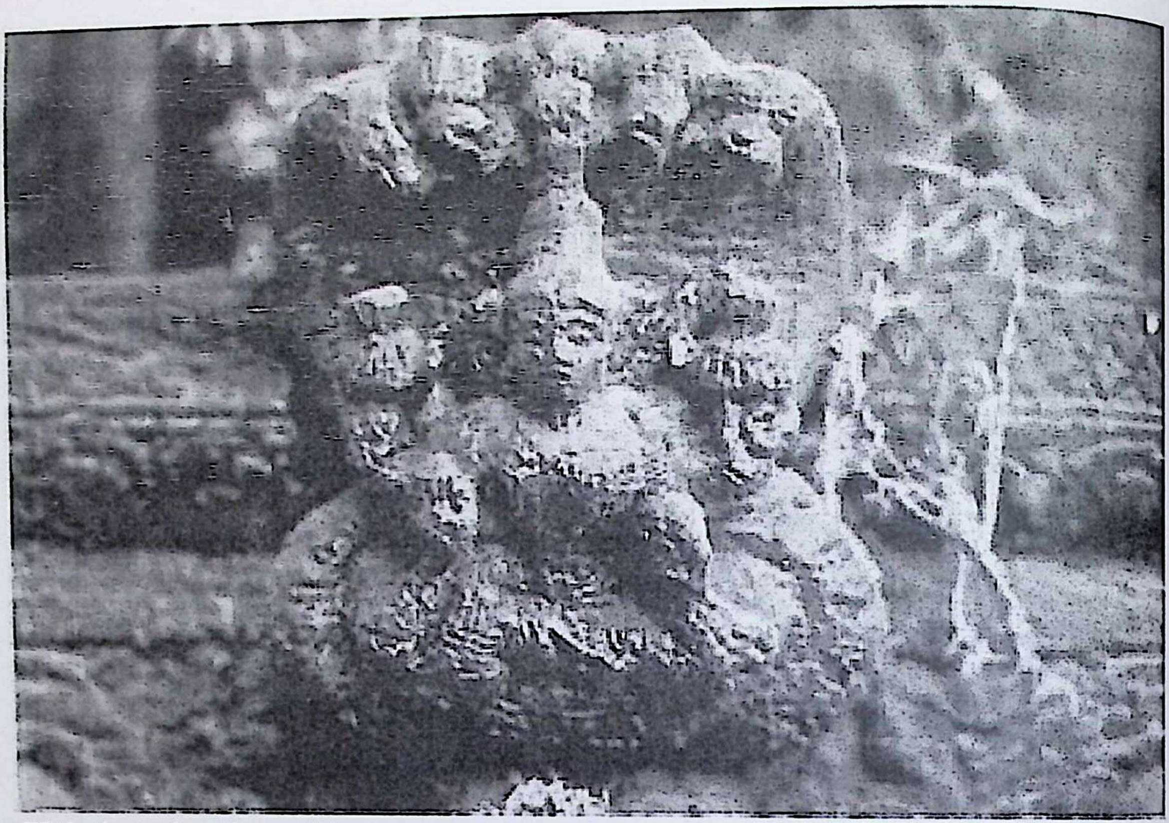
Vasuki is the snake goddess with five hoods and under the command and protection of Sri Vishnu. Vasuki always placed just behind the Sarathi and right at the centre of the ratha mookha and between the Bhootappar below and the tortoise incarnation above. She has a beautiful face of a lady with five hoods in front of the ratham while her feet are seen to project at the back of the ratham. She protects the ratham by binding and holding all the components together during the "chala and achala" (stationary and moving) state. She is coiled around the ratham holding it entirely by her coils thus preventing it from disintegration. The coils of Vasuki are never shown in the ratham. She symbolizes the need to gather together and put all our efforts in the physical, vital and mental spheres and hold them together and at the same time to remain focused and concentrated on the goal so that there is no deviation, distraction, disintegration and breaking away during our journey of life towards the divine.

As one progressively goes up from below, the stories depicted in the panels change. Above the Bhootappar we have the panels showing the activities of human and is called "Manusaya". As one moves further upwards there are panels of gods and goddess as they appear among human to guide them, test them, bless them etc. In the devaratham dedicated to Perumal or lord Vishnu we come across the Dasa-avatar panel, which shows the ten incarnations of lord Vishnu. In Shiva temples we see his various forms like Nataraja, Dhakshinamoorty, Kankalamurti, Shiva-Parvati Brishava vahana murti, etc. Similarly in the Vinayaga ratham we have Nadana Vinayaga, Pancha mookha Vinayaga, etc. In the Devi rathams we have Kali, Ganga, Parvati, Mahaisasura mardhini etc. All the ratham will have features of Vishnu, Shiva, Ganapati, Amman, Lakshmi, and the lesser known gods and goddesses, even though the predominant feature may be related to the principal deity to whom the ratham is dedicated. There may be some interesting panels like the urdha tandava murti with many gods and goddess participating with Shiva performing the classical urdha tandava as in Villianur Shiva ratham; panel of polycephanous gods and goddess like Mahasadashiva, Mahaganapati, Mahavishnu, Mahalakshmi etc in one panel as in Villianur Vinayaga ratham; panel depicting the story of Narasimha in all his forms; Yogi Narasimha, Veda patha Narasimha, Lakshmi Narasimha, Hiranyakashyapu vadham etc. as in the Sengeri Narashima koil devaratham.



Vasuki at the base of the Kamatchiamman koil devaratham, Puducherry

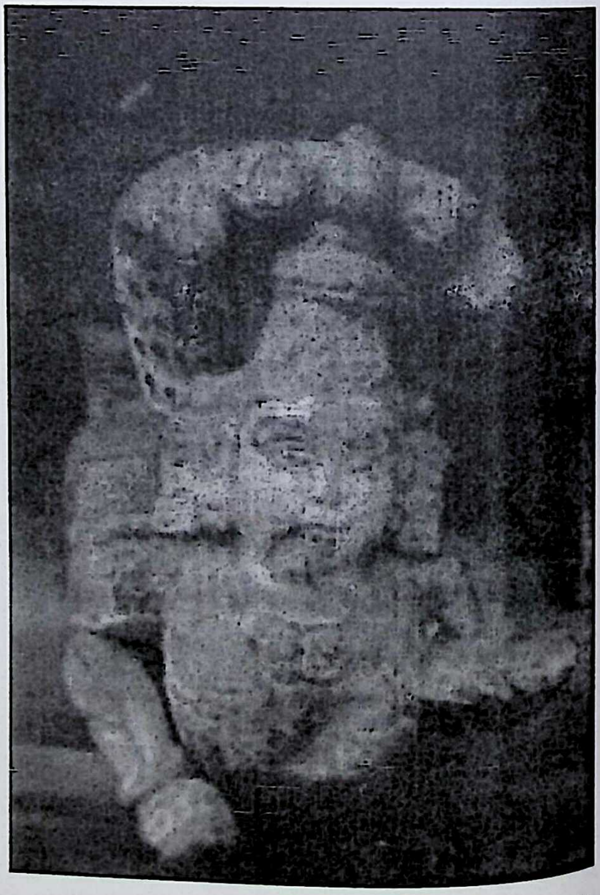
Since first the earth-being's heavenward growth began



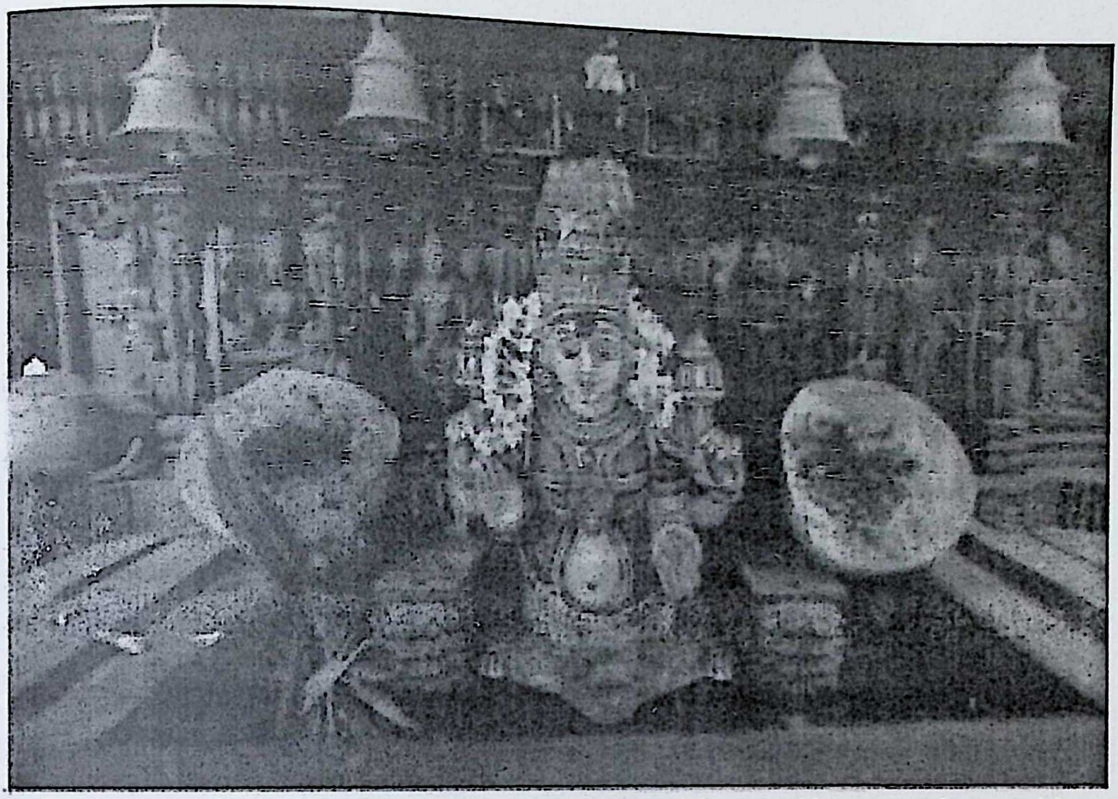
While the tardy coilings of the aeons pass

VASUKI

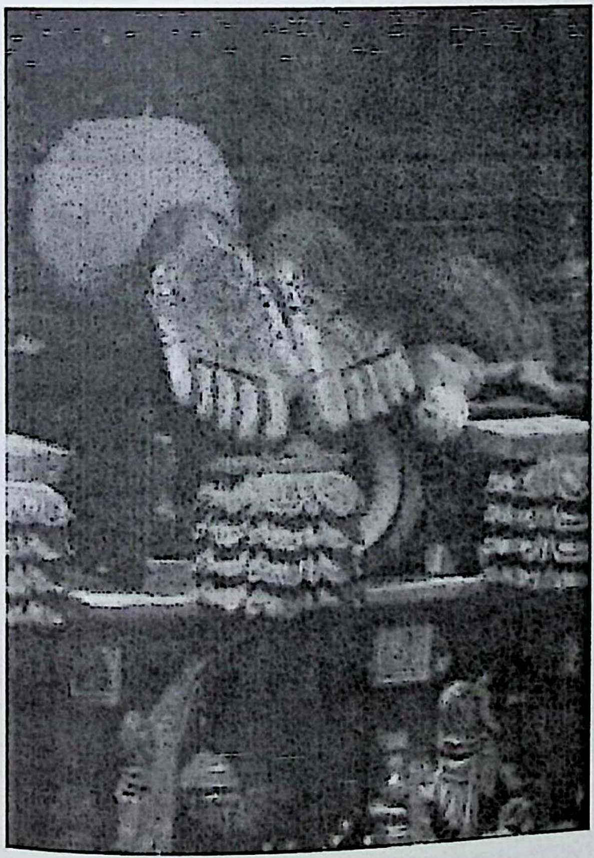
Vasuki seen from many rathams in Pondicherry. The right hand corner is from a small Catta teir of the Sengeniamman koil in Vaithikuppam. The above is from Sengeri Narashima koil. In the right she appears to be lying flat on her belly raising her head and the hoods are above her and the feet will always appear outstretched at the back of the ratham. The figure above shows her to be seated on sukhasana with the back hands holding two lotus and the front hands in abhaya and varada mudra.



In her own self she found her high recourse;



And the Animal browses in the sacred fence



Things hidden by the silence of the hours

Vasuki

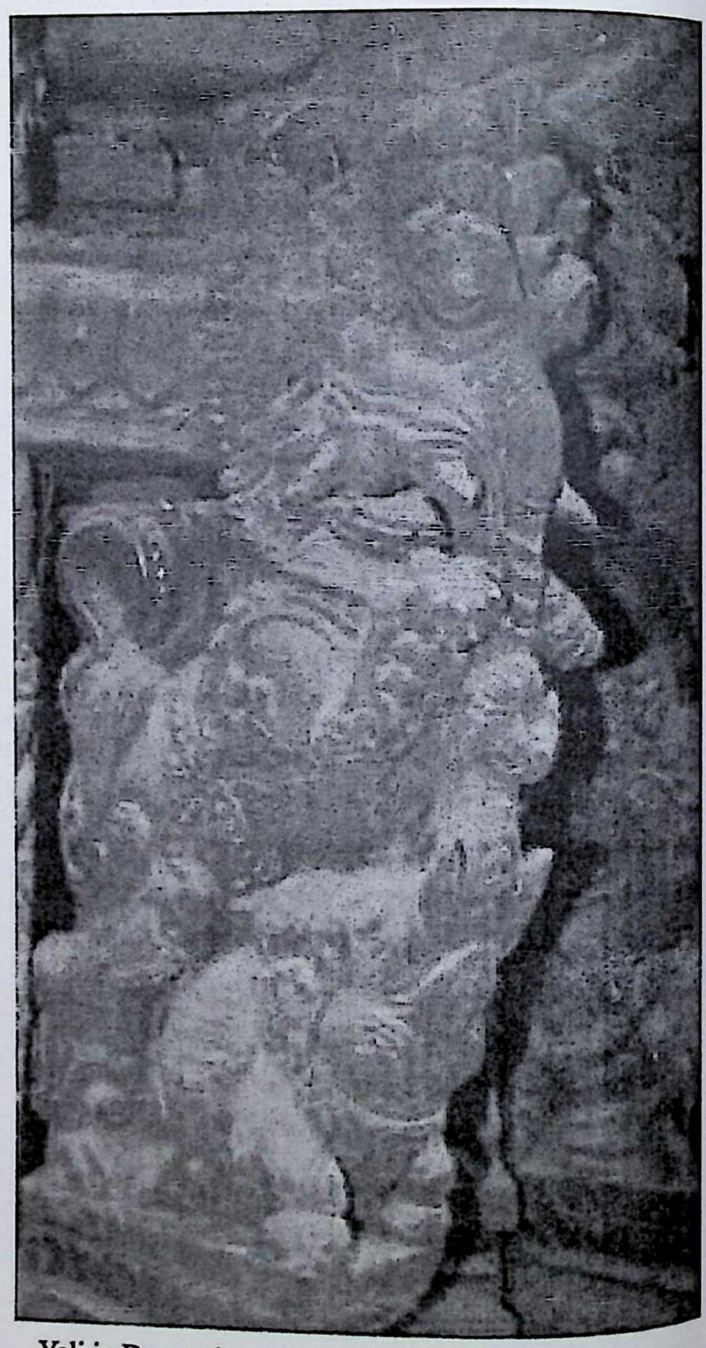
Vasuki the snake goddess is always at the base of the ratham holding two lotus in back hands and the front hands are in abhaya and varada mudra. She is seated on the tortoise form of lord Vishnu and has five hoods. she is symbolically coiled all around the devaratham and her feet is seen to be projecting away at the back of the ratham. Cut pumpkin smeared with termeric and sindur are offered to her, on the back a bowl of rice , ripe banana and beetlenut leafs are also offered on the rathayatra day.

She prevents the ratham from getting disintegrated by holding and tying it firmly around her coils at the behest of Lord Vishnu who himself supports her from below.

The insignia of the lord is always prominently carved and painted in all the devarathams so that it can be seen from far. The popular symbol used is shankha, chakra (the conch and disc) and tilak vertically drawn for all the Vishnu rathams.

On the **four corners** at either end of the panels we find different animal motifs in all the four directions. In addition we may see fairly large motifs forming the corners of the devarathams. In the lowest rung we have the horse, then the lion and then the elephant at the highest level. There is a symbolism behind the placement of these motifs. The horse signifies speed, the lion strength and the elephant signifies intelligence. Further the horse represents our physical body with its strength, the lion the vital or pranic power while the elephant represents the mental faculty and in the Bhuddhi Shakti i.e. the power to discern. Hence they are placed one above the other.

In between the panels the horizontal bars of wood project and which actually forms a framework supporting the platform and the vimana above. The tips of these wooden pieces are covered by many decorative figures. Sometimes we see a series of yalis covering these projections

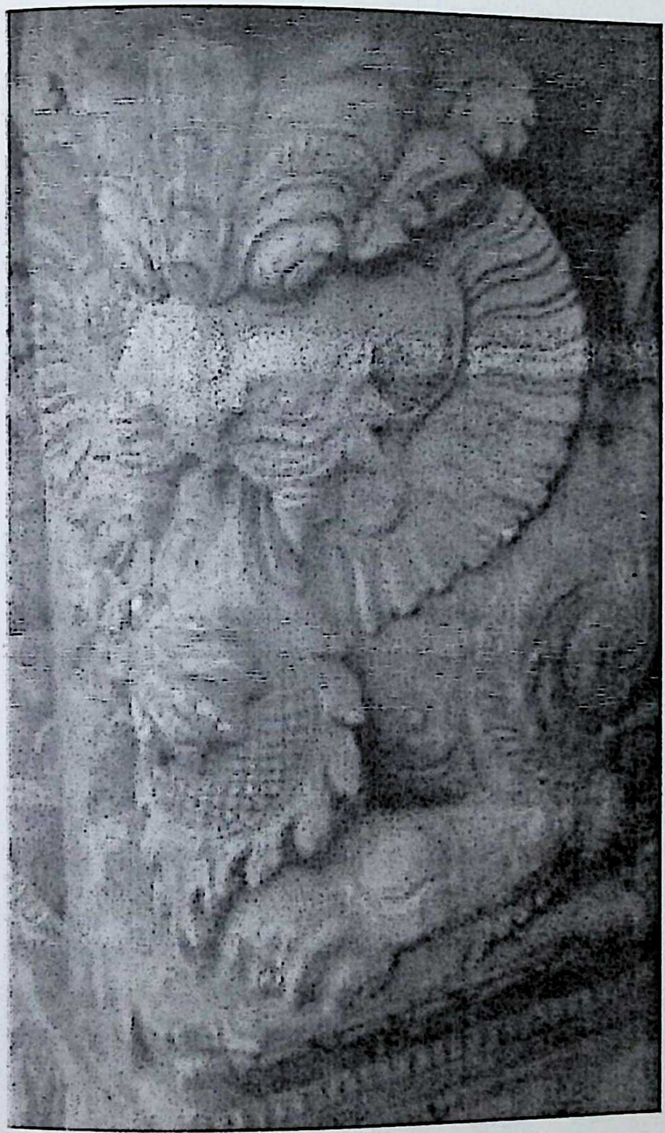


Yali in Devaratham

The lion faced Yali with an elephant tusk which is a mythological figure with a baby elephant below

Appeared upon the cosmic vague background.

to form a complete row and provide interesting break in the story presented in the panel. Some of these decorations are very simple, some very intricate with complex design filling out the spaces or forming patterns.

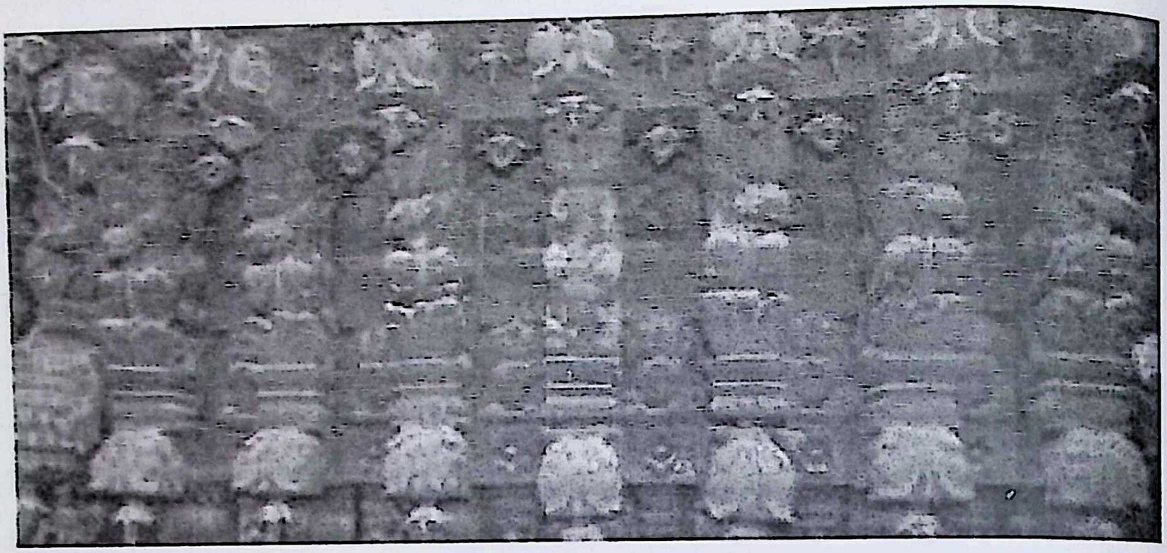


Lion faced yali with a projection from its mouth

A fire to call eternity into Time,

Yalis are mythological figure having different animals forming the different parts of the body. They may include the elephant, lion, horse and sometimes the humans also. The yalis may form a part of the ratham structure and be integrated into the body of the ratham. They may be also be made up of bright red, blue and black colors. These may be attached to the ratham in all the corners during the festival and removed at the end of the rathaushtava for safe keeping to be used in later years.

The bell is also called as Ghanti. They are hung in rows attached to the platform above and form a decorative ring all round the ratham. Some of the rathams have bells attached to rings in all the tiers of the main body. Some of the rathams have medium to large sized bells attached to the four corners. These bells are either single or four in number. These bells make a beautiful pleasing sound during the rathayatra. Most of the temples particularly the Vishnu temples have a large bell permanently placed in the temple complex. In the important festivals the bell is struck continously during the arati. This bell is located inside or just outside the sanctum-sanctum. It



Row of Yalis in the Amman ratham at Villianur, Pondicherry.

The image of God overtaking finite shape

Lion faced Yali with the front limbs raised and the back limbs stretched from Villianur, Pondicherry.

This greater life wavers twixt earth and sky.

The fierce looking Shiva gana and two Kinni plates along with a lady wearing a garland of skulls from the Kamatchiamman koil at Pondicherry

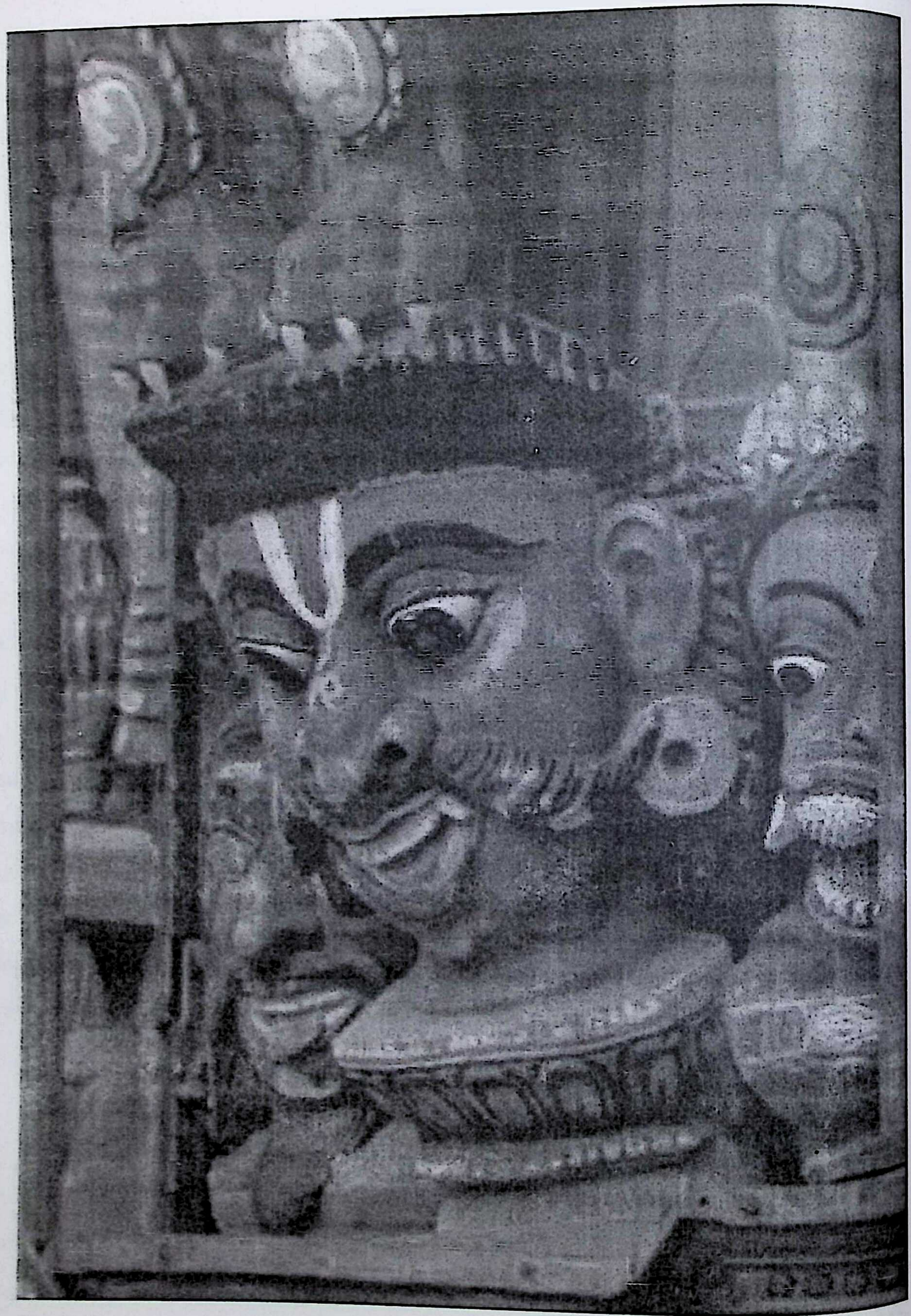
In the casual error of the world's ignorance is considered to be very auspicious to ring the bell; hence children and toddlers are lifted by the parents to ring the bell. The ringing of the bell is to communicate with the Lord directly one to one, that his devotee has come to have the lord's darshan. In the daily ritual of puja, archana and aradhana in the temple the pujari or priest holds and rings a simple bell in the left hand while reciting the mantra. Hence the same practice goes on of ringing the bell by the devotees young and old on the devaratham during the ratha uthsava.

The corners of the devaratham is used by the sthapati to depict many day to day activities of the universe. Invariably in the corners we have lot of bhootas, animals, birds, mythological figures, as well as human activities like delivery of a child by being conducted by a woman dai or female attendant. In the niches we see many erotic and mithuna panels. As we go up further close to the platform graceful lute players, chouli bearers, dalamaliks, dwarapalas etc are carved. Some of the lesser known gods and the Dikpalas in the respective directions are also seen. The corners have a large projection of elephant, lion and horse motif from top to bottom respectively. Some among them may be very complex mythological figures involving many types of animals, but they are in fine proportion and intricately carved out with great details.

The platform above the body of the ratham is flat and at its centre is the Devasam. The **Devasam** may be single or double and rarely three layered. In most of the moderately sized rathams they are in two tiers and only in exceptionally large rathams like Thiruvarur, Thiruvanamalai etc the Devasam is three tiered. The top tier is called as the Simhasanam or the lion throne. The simple Cattateir, small Velliteir and Thanga teir (silver and golden ratham respectively) do not have a separate Devasam and hence no panels or carvings. In larger rathams the Devasana is two tiered with the first tier having four of the Ashtalakshmi in the four directions.

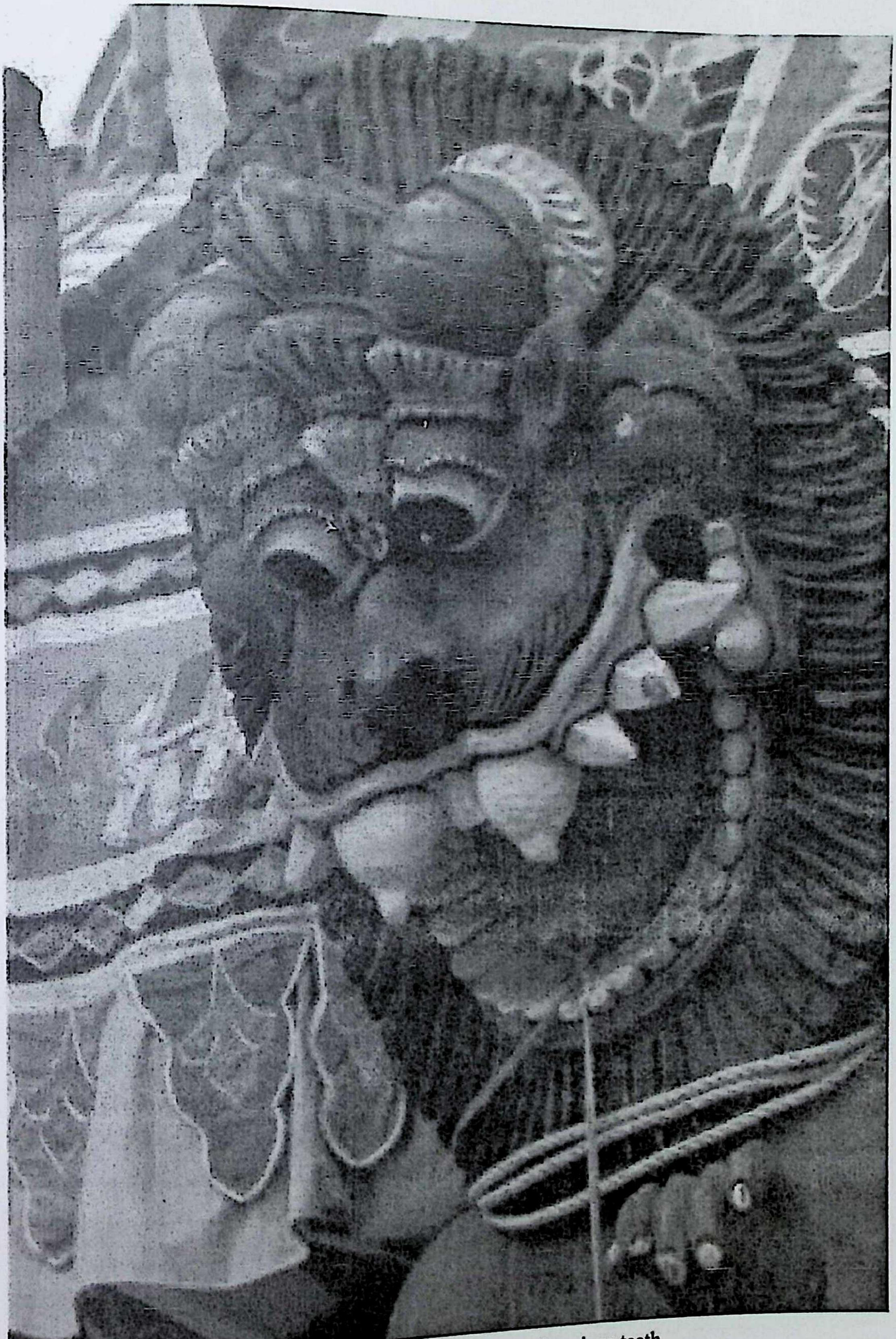
Ashtalakshmi

Ashtalakshmi literally means eight Lakshmi; they are the different aspects of Sri Lakshmi. Sri Lakshmi is the consort of Sri Vishnu and is the beholder of all riches. She is the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Wealth and prosperity is not limited to material things but also include all forms of knowledge, good health, strength, progeny power and wealth. In all



The Vishnu gana at the feet of the yali.

There are the ominous masks, the terrible powers



The lion faced Yali colorful, large eyes, open mouth with ferocious teeth.

And I am driven by the reins of God.

the deva-rathams on all the four sides of the devasthanam and the simhasana we have Ashtalakshmi present. Hence it is very auspicious to pray to her while she is seated on the devaratham. The common forms of these are Adi Lakshmi (Mahalakshmi), Dana Lakshmi, Dhyana Lakshmi, Gaja Lakshmi, Shantana Lakshmi, Veera Lakshmi, Vijaya Lakshmi, Vidya Lakshmi. Some of the other popular forms of Lakshmi are considered to be a part of the Ashta Lakshmi and thus may be portrayed along in the temples as well as devarathams. Even though in the temples we have the Astha Lakshmi presented as a group, in the rathams we observe that they are present singly at different tiers of the ratham. There are definitely seen in all the four directions just below the simhasana where the uthsava murti is placed during the rathayatra.

By the side of Lakshmi we may have decorative figures like apsara, dwarapalika, lady with musical instruments and attendants. Sometimes gods like Agni are next to Lakshmi as in the Villianur ratham.

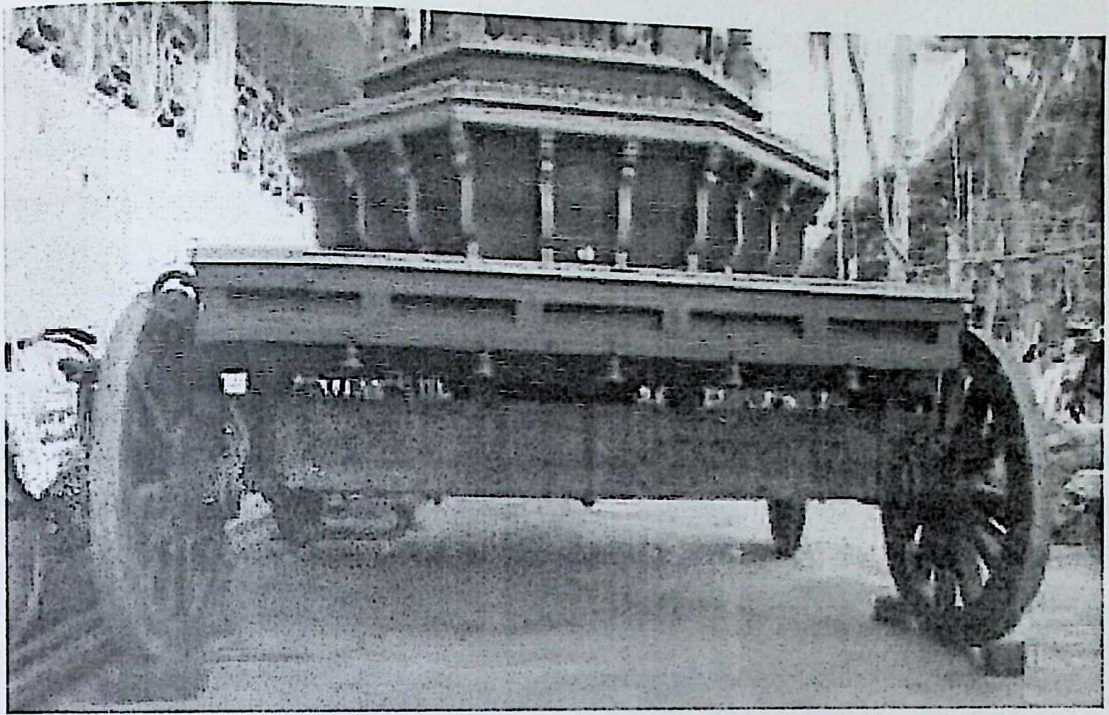
The last layer below the simhasana has the insignia or the symbol of the main deity to whom the ratham is dedicated like shankha, chakra, gada and padma (the conch, disc, mace and lotus) for Perumal. Otherwise this layer is free from any decorations and carvings.

Shimhasana

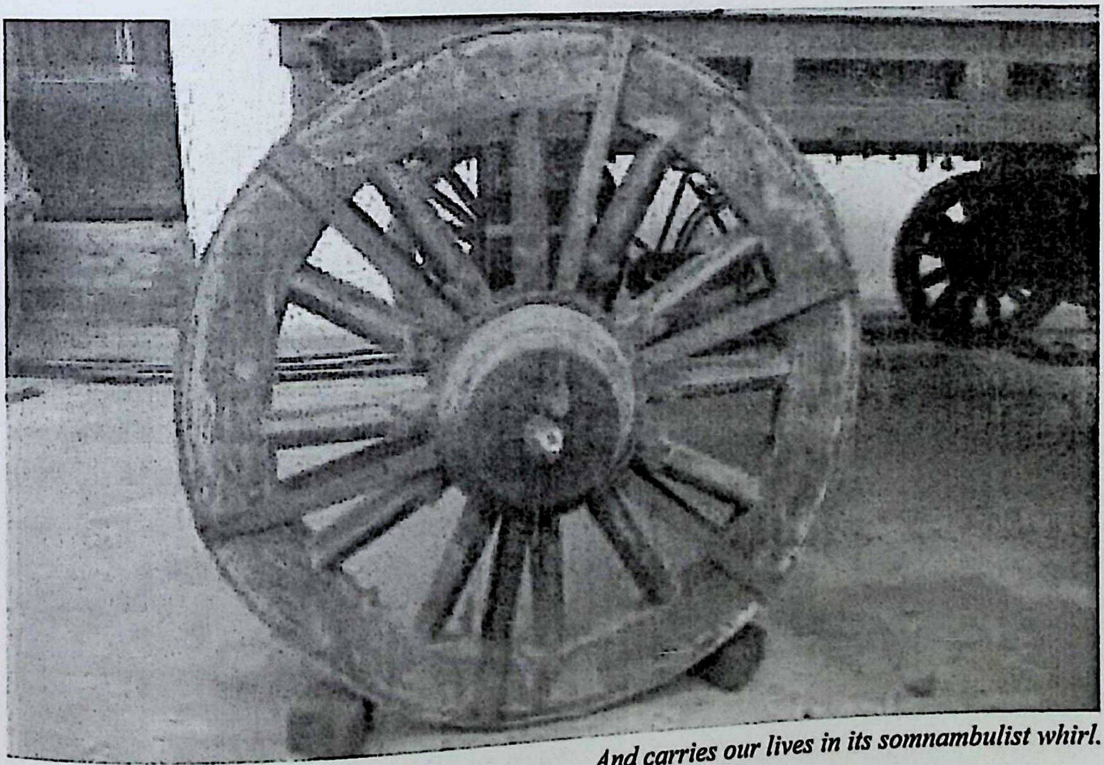
On the simhasana we have four iron rings in the four corners. The uthsava murti placed on a wooden stand with similar rings. These rings on the ratham and the wooden stand are tied firmly with thick ropes to provide stability and prevent the murti from falling over.

The temples have an exterior which has all kinds of images, decorations, secular, religious, even erotic art are depicted and represents the sensorial or outer aspect of human being – the mental-vital-physical complex (maana-prana-sarira).

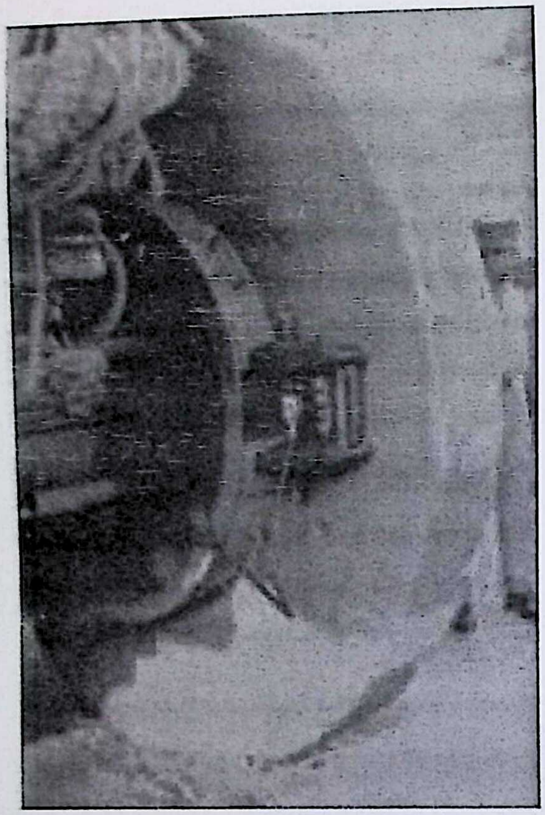
The Wheels and Brake systems of the Davarathams.



The simplest of wheels which are seen in a Catta teir, has a simple design with twelve spokes and a ring of iron plate over its rim connected to a similar ring above the axle with iron plates six in number to give additional strength Observe the five bells and the back axle.

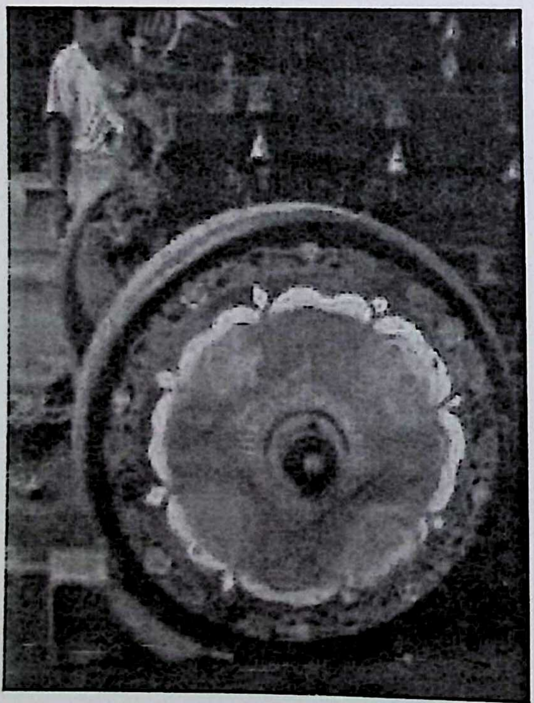


And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.

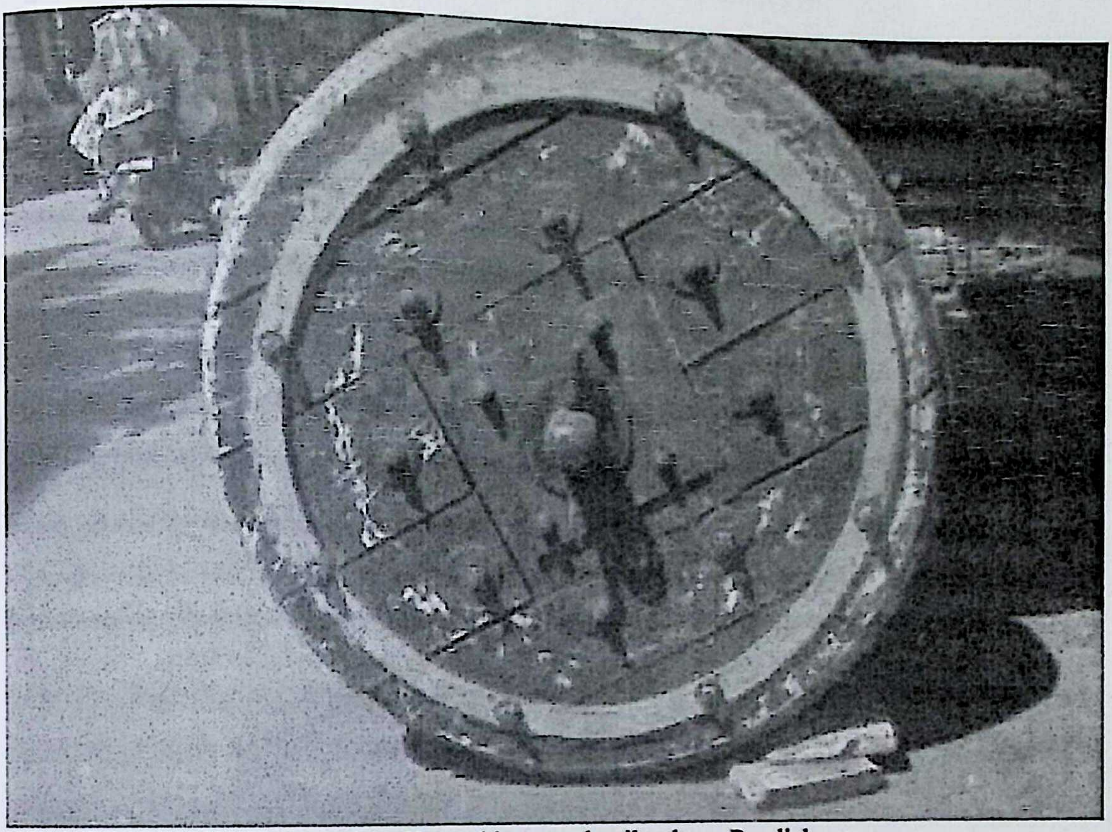


A wooden wheel with a steel rim attached with a hydrulic brake system in the ratham at Villianur in Pondicherry.

Close up of the wheel axle complex



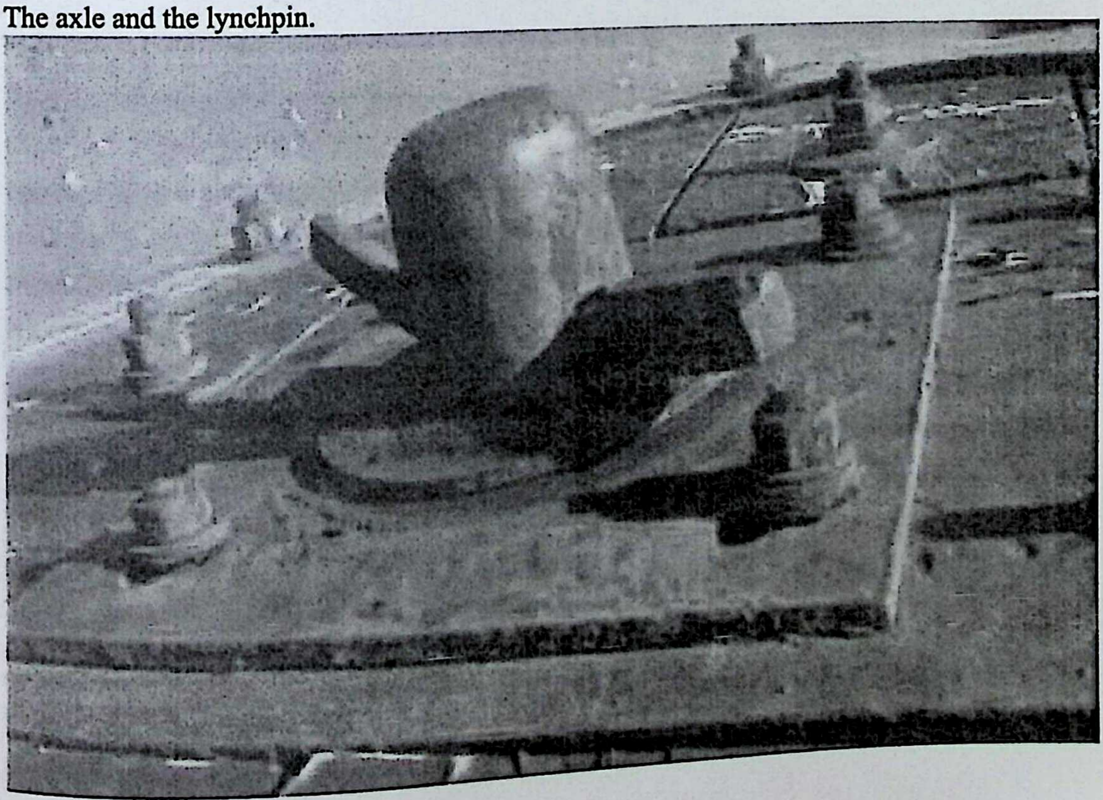
The steel wheel with a smooth edge and iron axle with decorations painted on the sides.

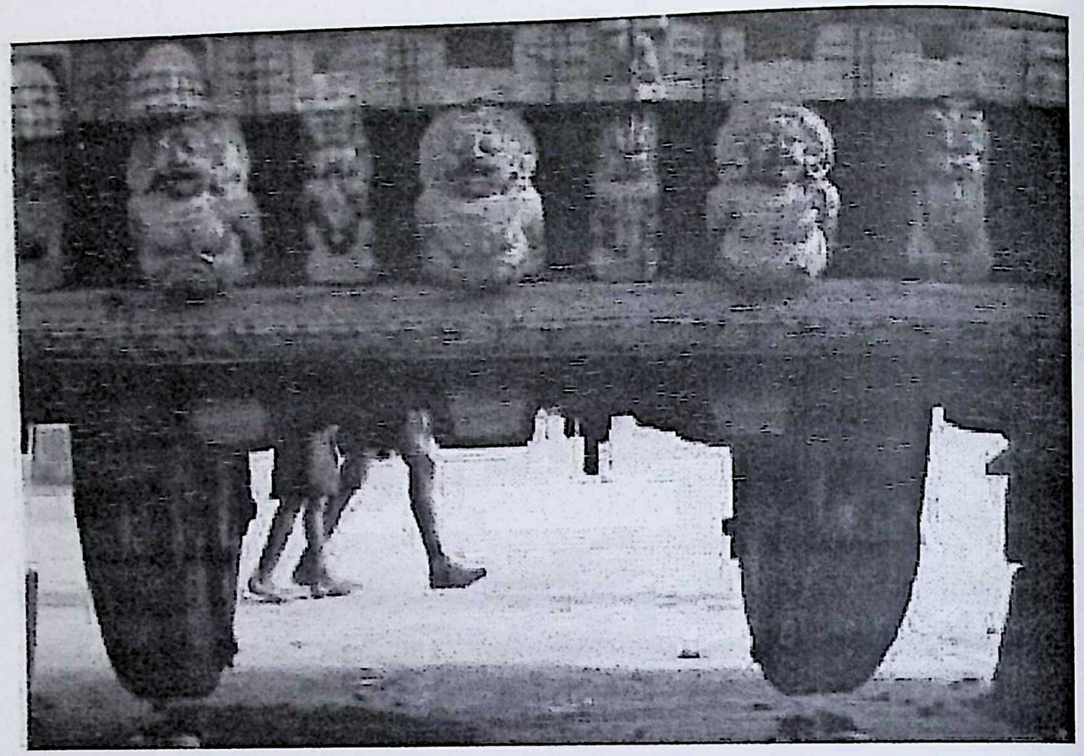


The side veiw of the wheel of the Kamachiamman kovil ratham, Pondicherry

Only a little breaks through our earth-made bounds,

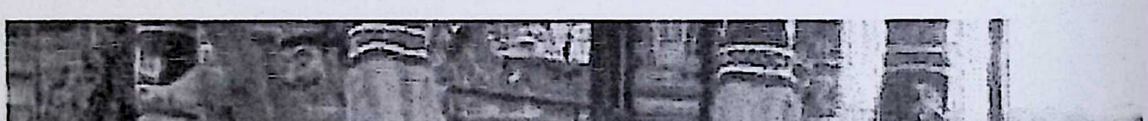
The axle and the lynchpin.





The inner wheels below the panchabhootapar of the Shakti ratham, Veerapatinam Puducherry.

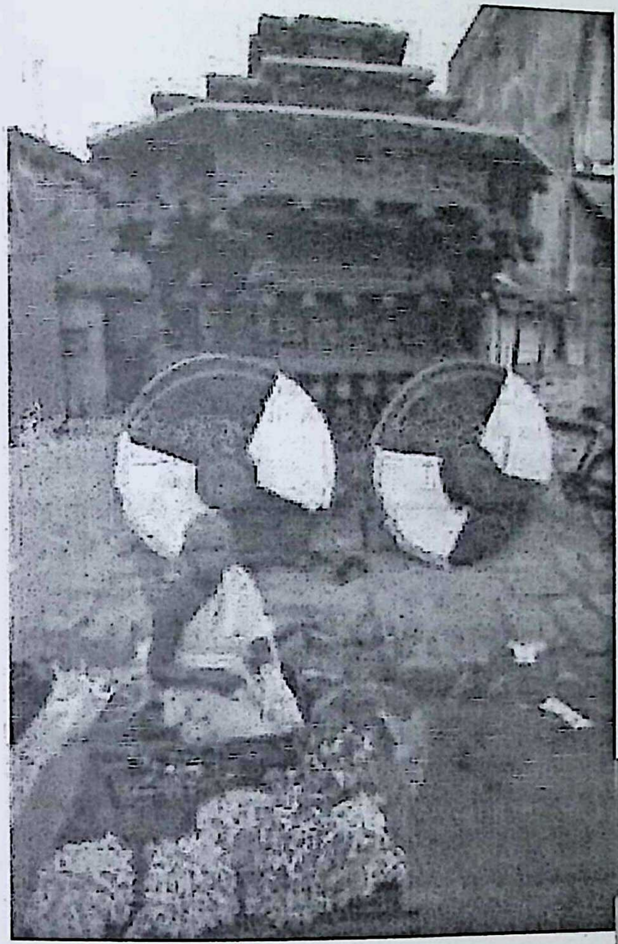
The old perpetual journey without pause.



A devaratham with the unique tadi and kudil on the right hand corner. The kudil is a wooden block which fits the width of the wheel, it is tied with ropes to lower or lift it up during the rathayatra to act as a brake; the tadi on to its right is used to leverage the wheels from behind to free it by placing underneath the wheel and thus freeing it.

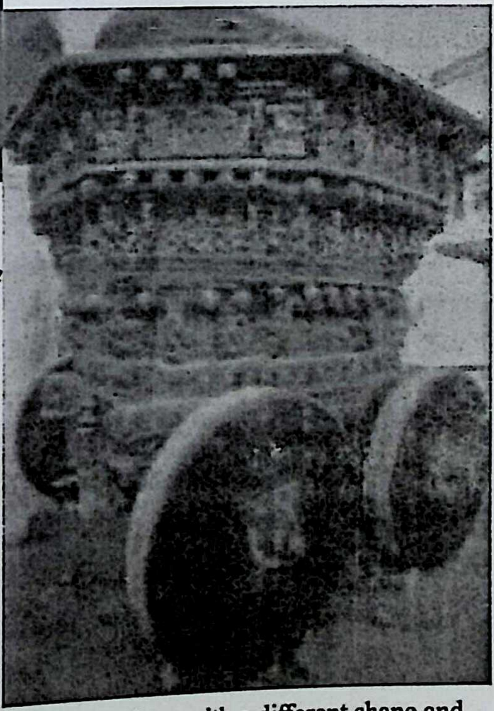
And light man's life upon his Godward road.

SHAPES OF DEVARATHAMS



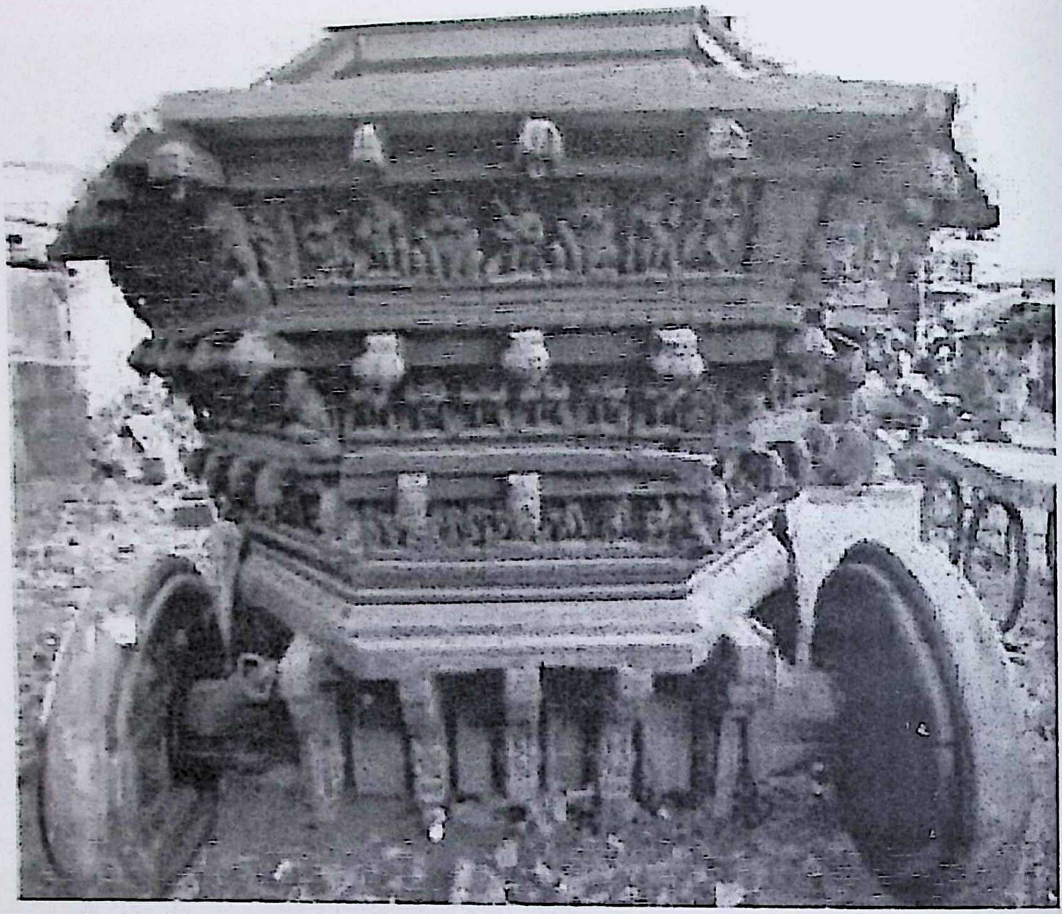
A lady selling flowers in front of the devaratham in Kumbakonam in Tamilnadu.

In every corner ensconced of conscious life



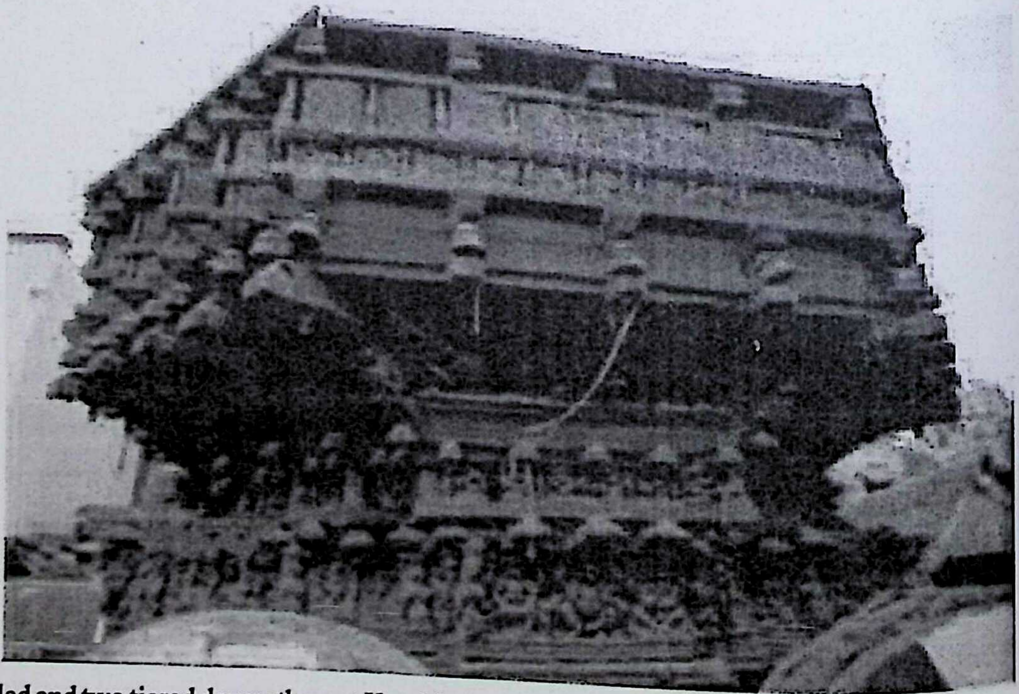
A devaratham with a different shape and wheel stracture in Kumbakonam.

On countless roads across the vasts of Time



Three tiered with six surfaces and two tiered simhasana of the devaratham at Kumbakonam, the Panchabhootapar over the axle is seen.

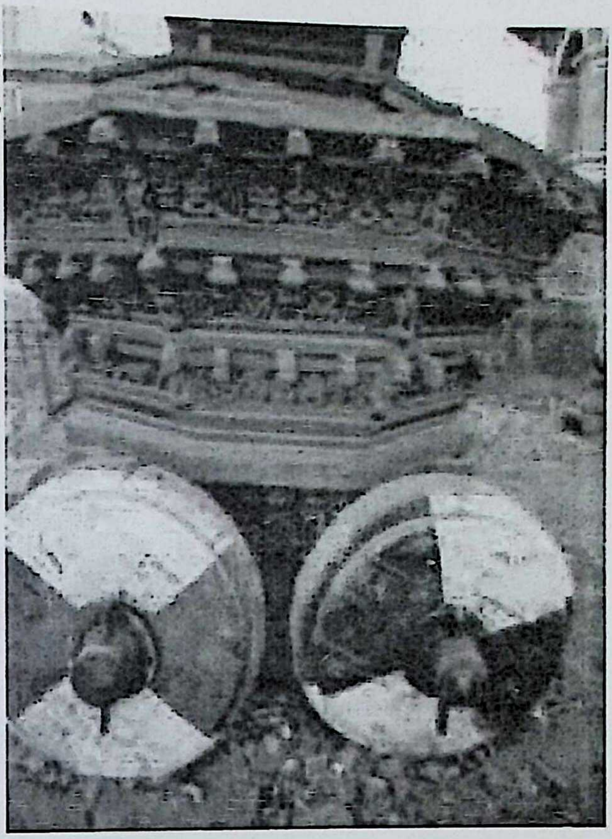
Hidden behind the fair outsides of life.

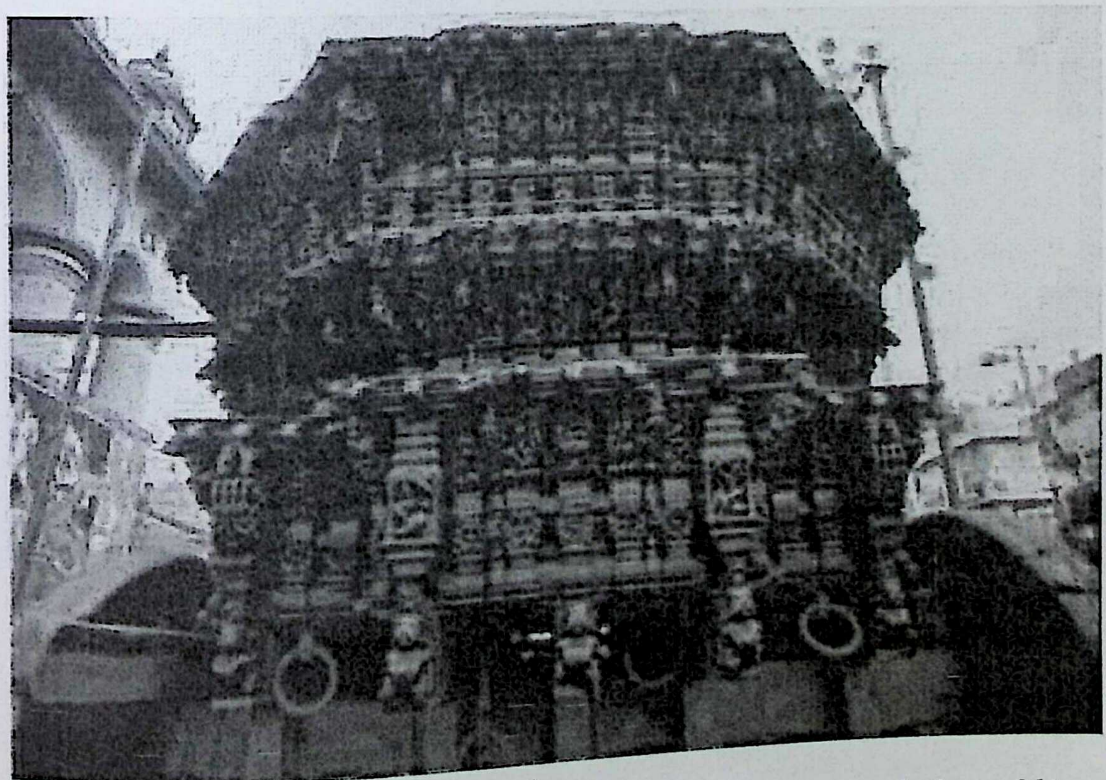


Six sided and two tiered devaratham at Kumbhokonam, Tamilnadu.

A thousand shapes it wore, took numberless names

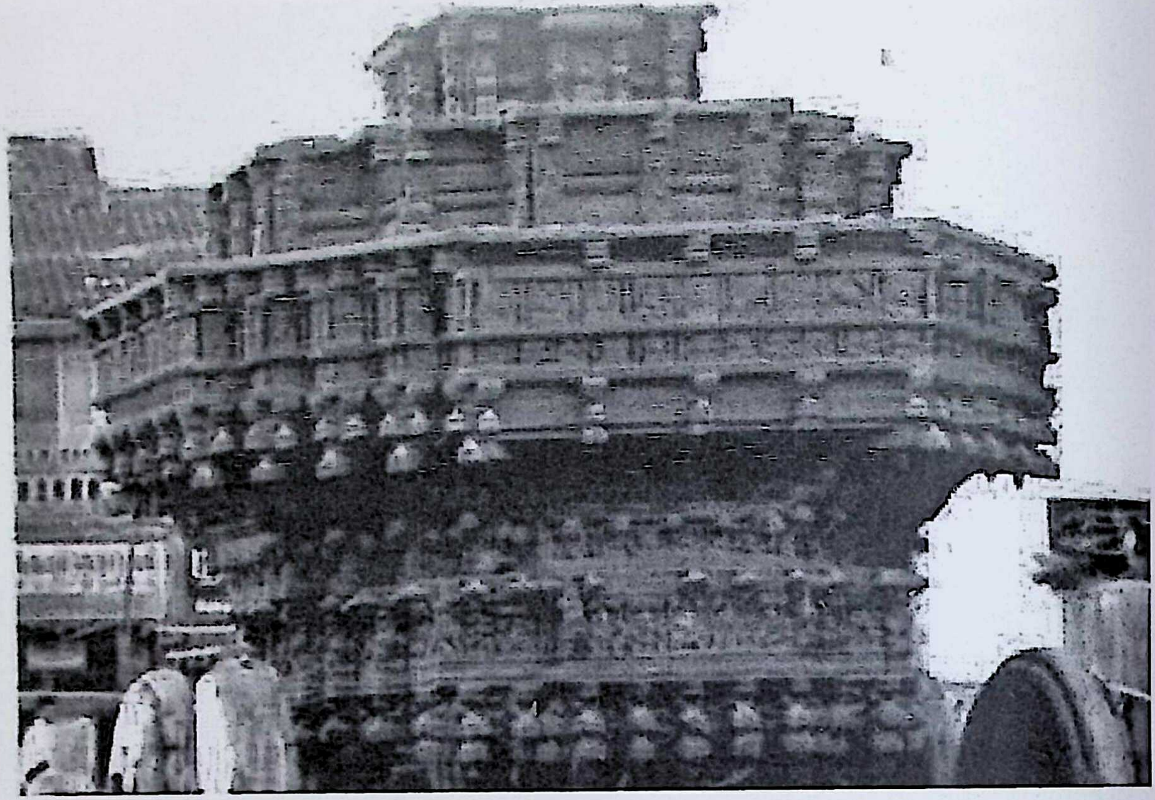
A devaratham at Kumbhokonam in Tamilnadu
Asleep behind the endless coil of things



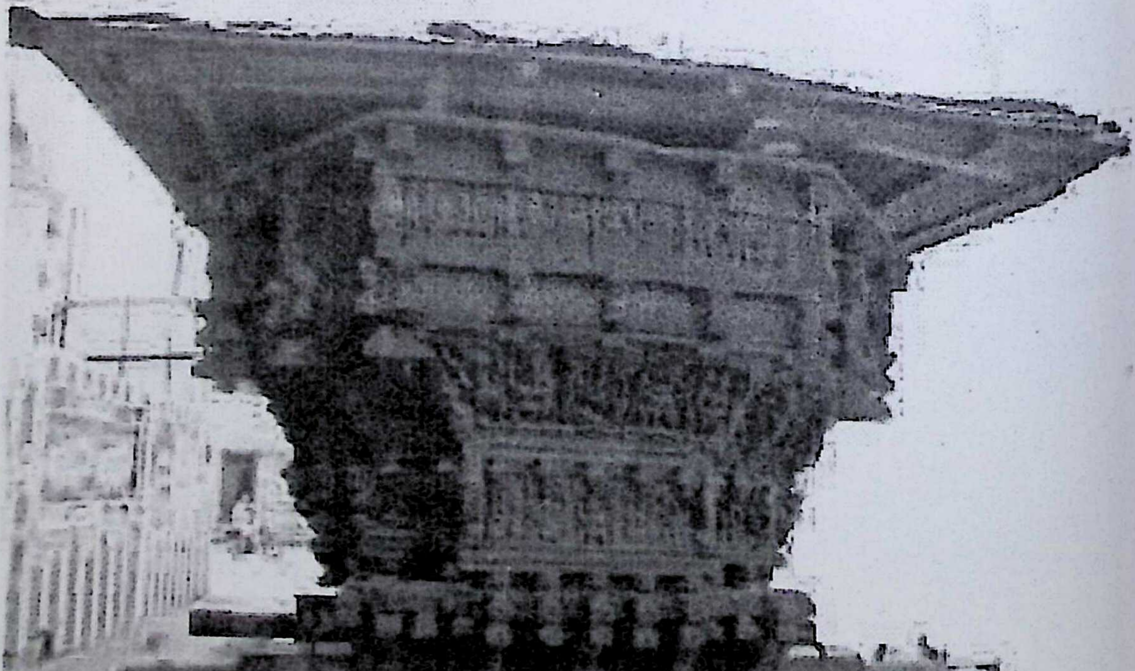


The devaratham of Thiruvanamalai Shiva temple.

Travelling to self across the forms of things.

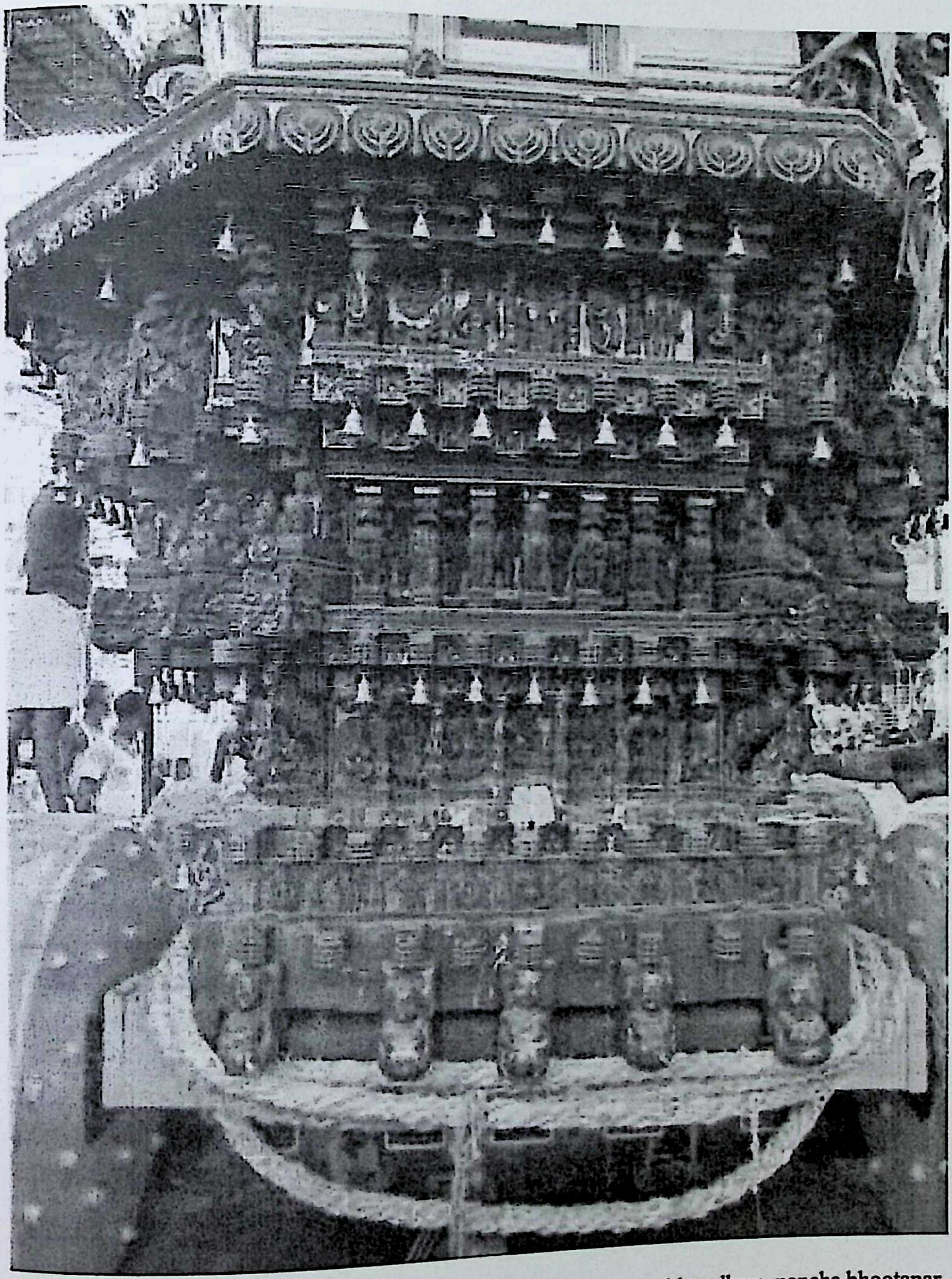


The devaratham of Vishnu temple at Kumbakonam



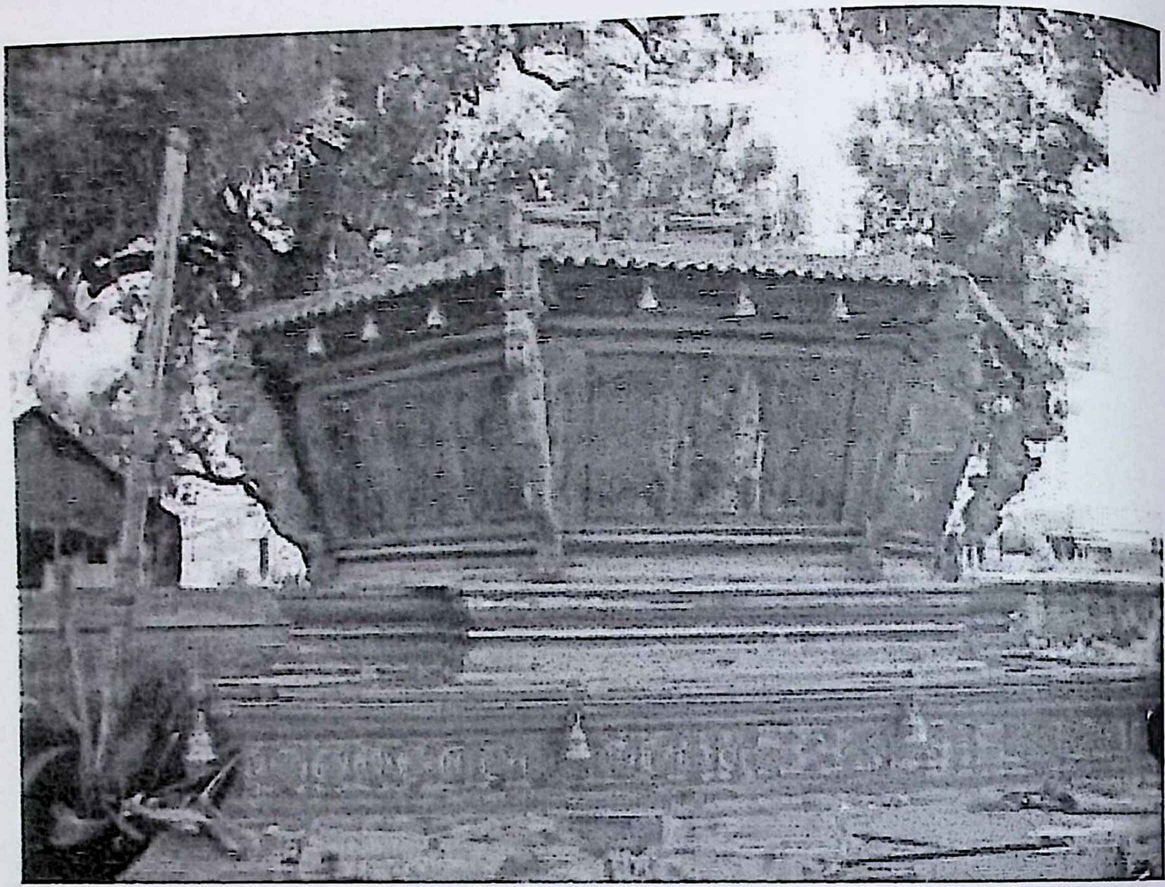
Devaratham near the Mahamaham tank in Kumbakonam in Tamil-nadu

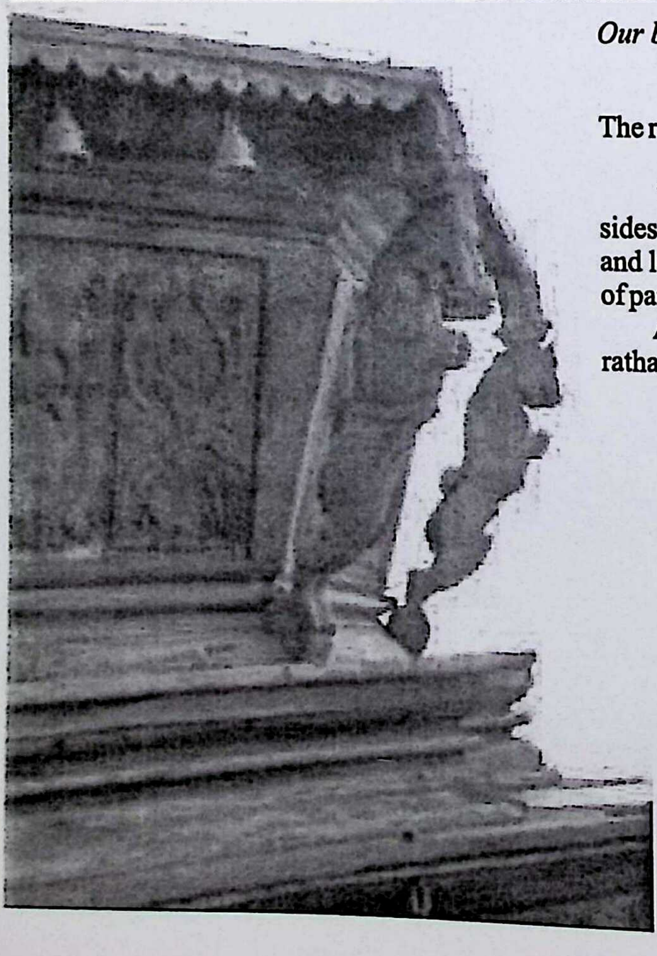
The Gross body of the Devarathams



Perumalkoil Devaratham : The main body seen from the back with vadham, pancha bhootapar, feet of vasuki, pada, wheels, axles etc

Too vast for souls not born to mate with heaven





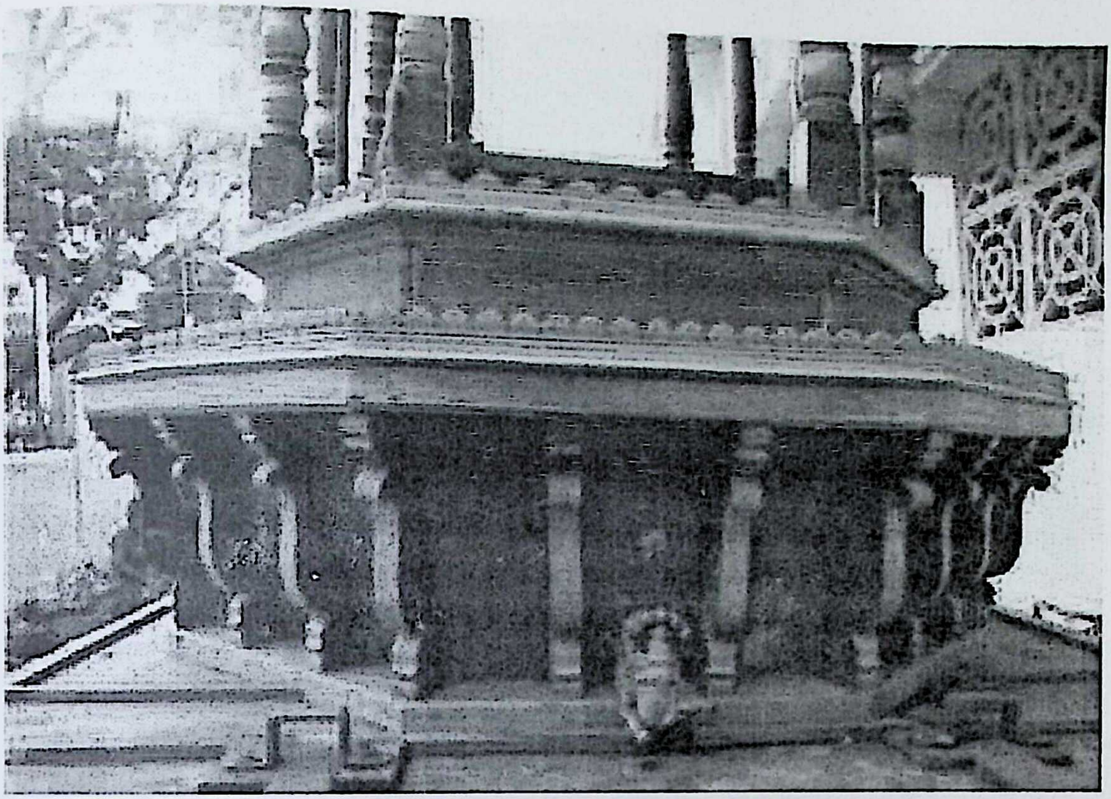
Our being in God's image be remade

The ratham at Karaikudi in Tamilnadu

The general veiw of the devaratham six sides pada,single tier shimhasana with small and large bells, Yali's at the corners, single set of panels all around.

A close up veiw of a section of the same ratham showing the corner.

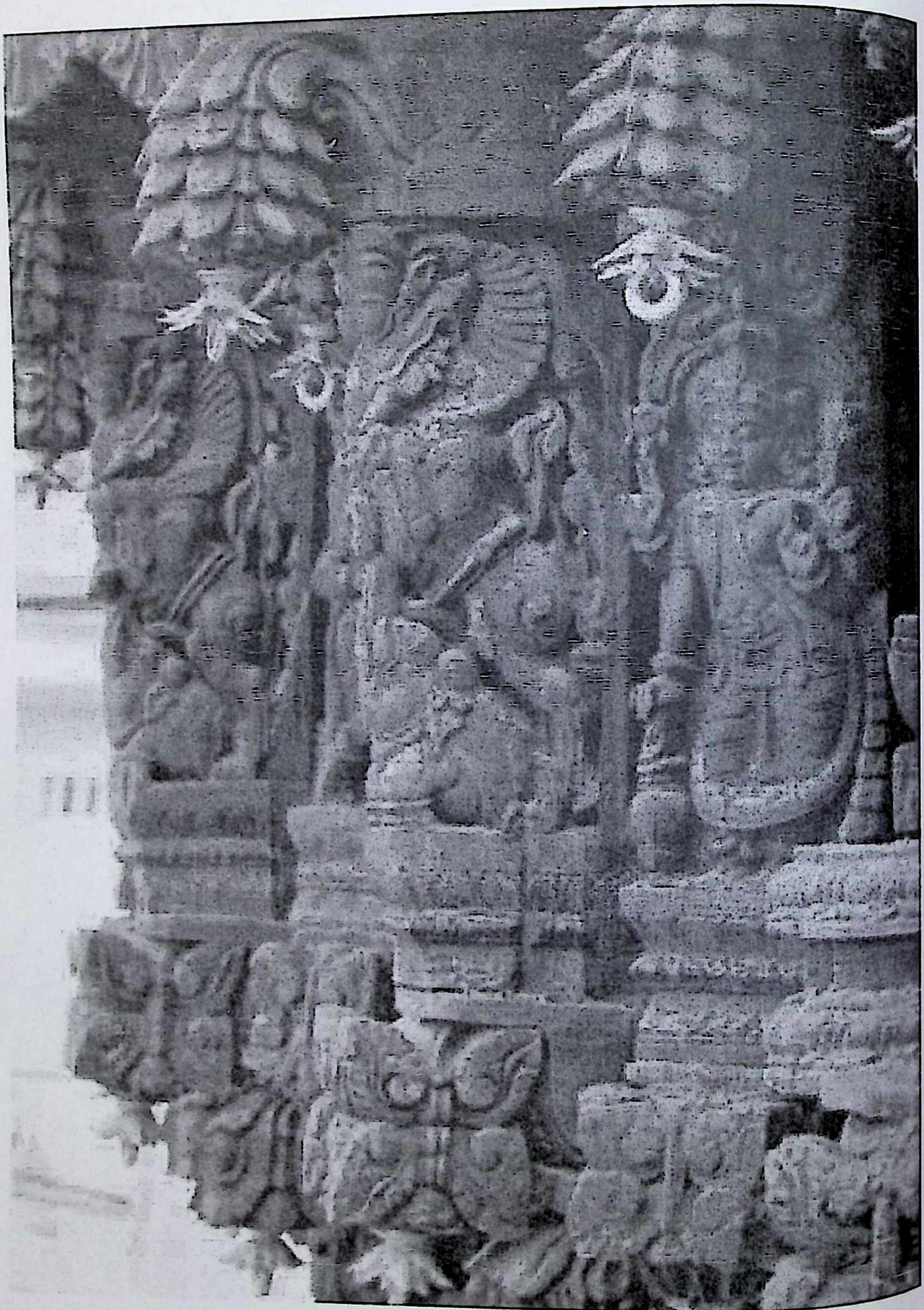
The Immobile stands behind each daily act,



Sengeniamman Ratham :The simple catta teir does not have any panels or decorations. It is very simple with Vasuki seen in front and her feet seen at the back below.

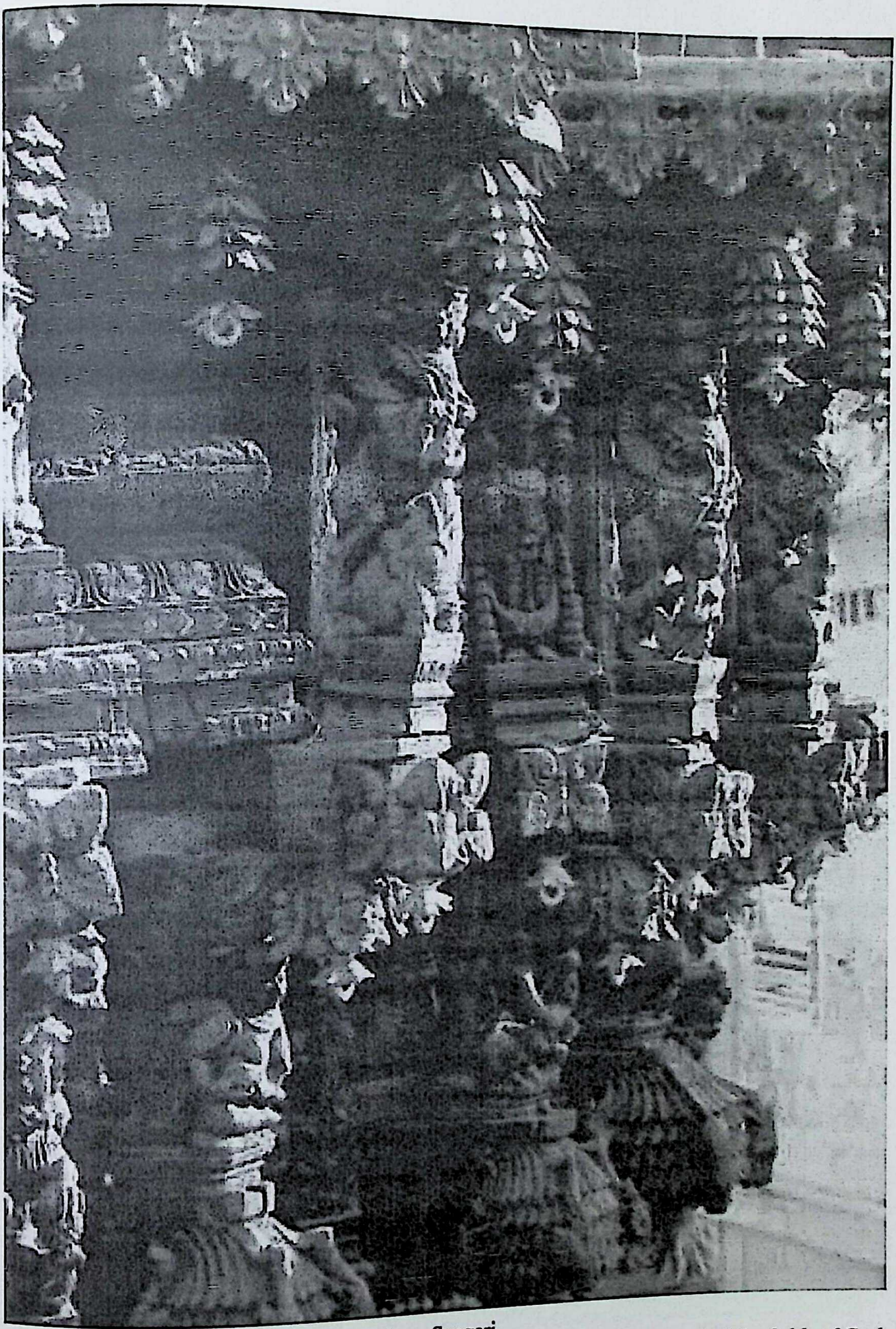
Nor trespass into rhythms too high or vast.

The Corners of the Devarathams



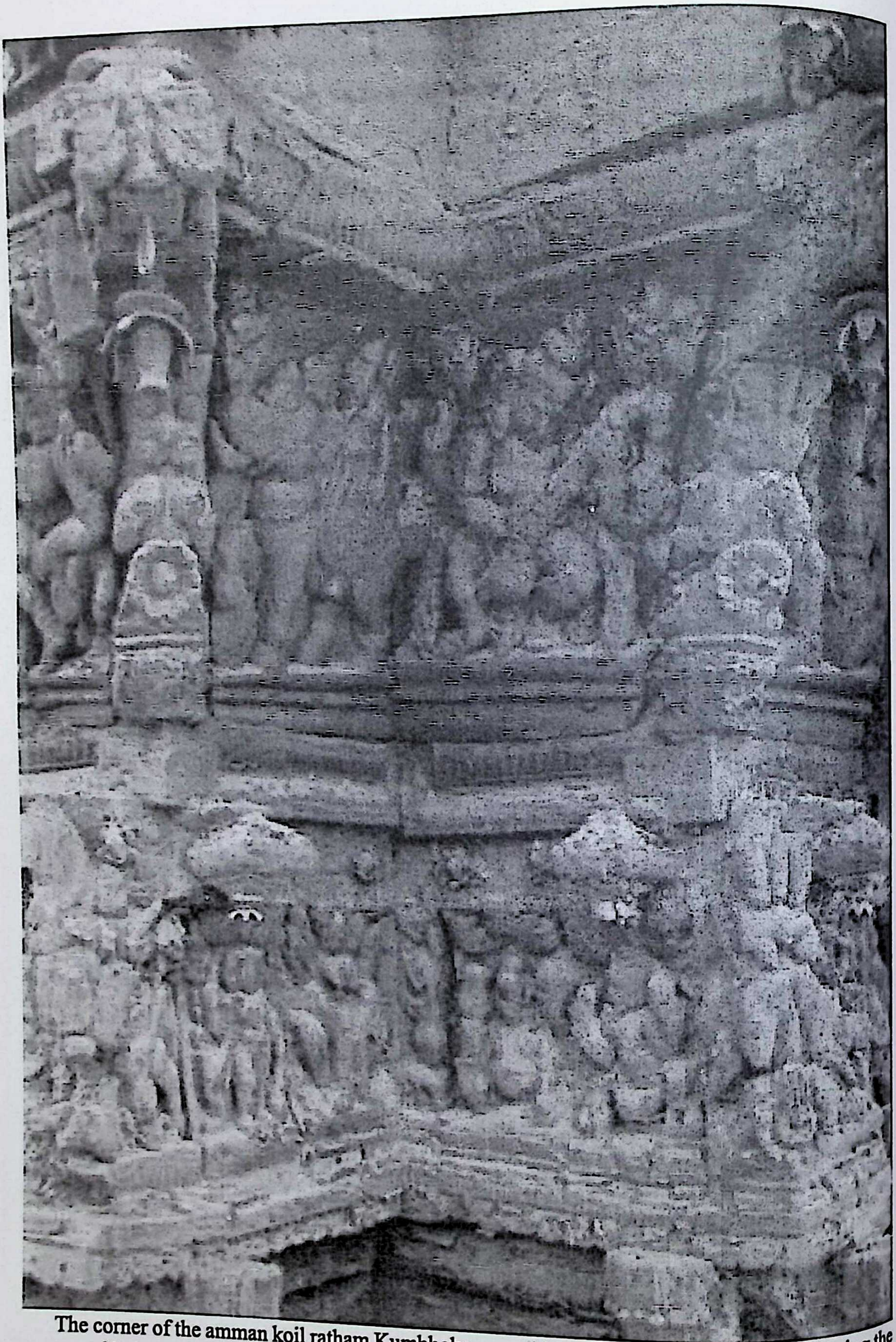
The right corner of the ratham of Sri Narashima temple at Sengeri, Abhisheka pakkam, Pondicherry.

A sound came quivering like a loved footfall



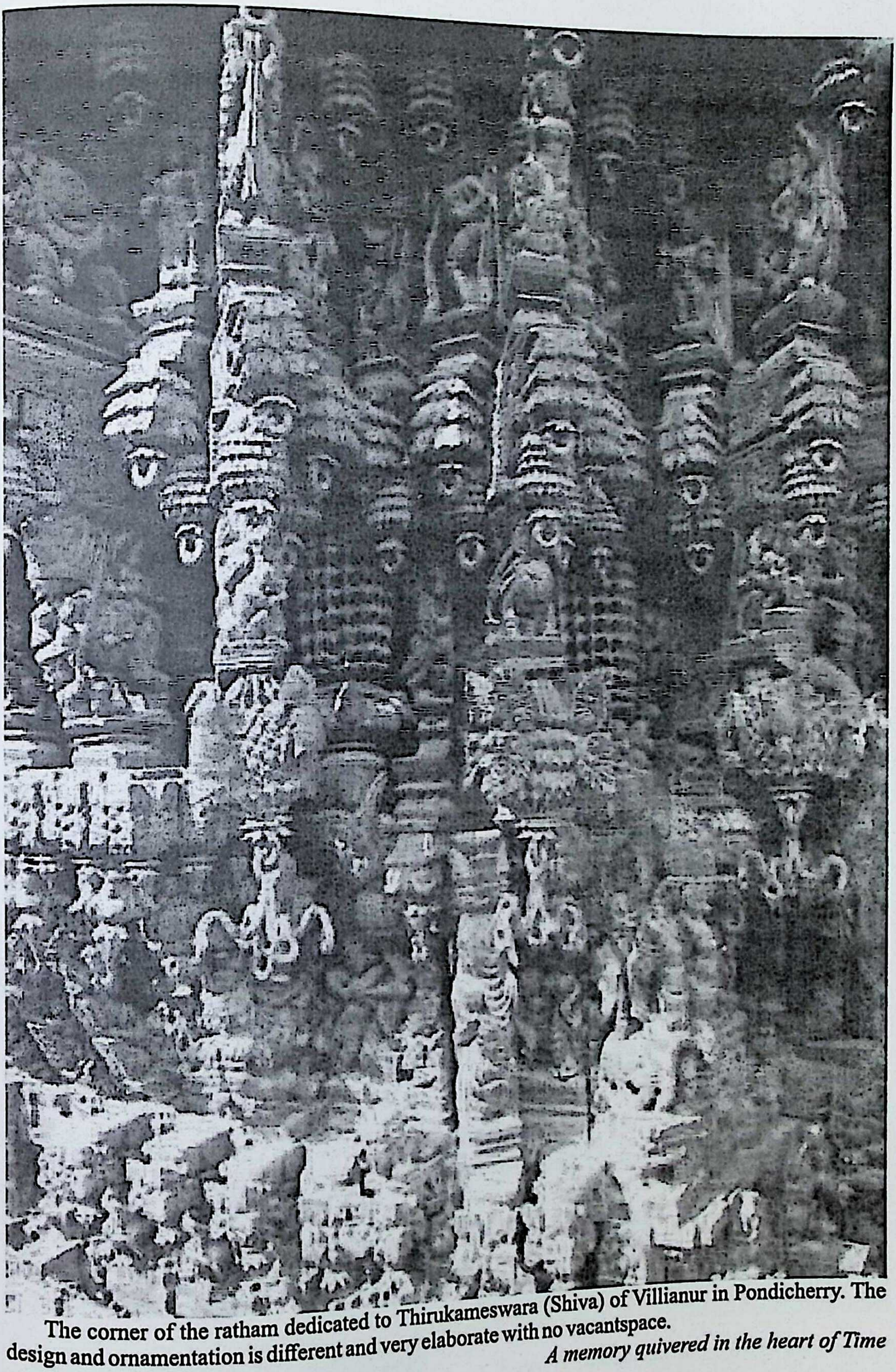
The Corner of the Narashima kovil devaratham, Sengeri.

And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.



The corner of the amman koil ratham Kumbhokonam with many yalis, and Saraswati playing the veena and Indra seated on Aryabhatta.

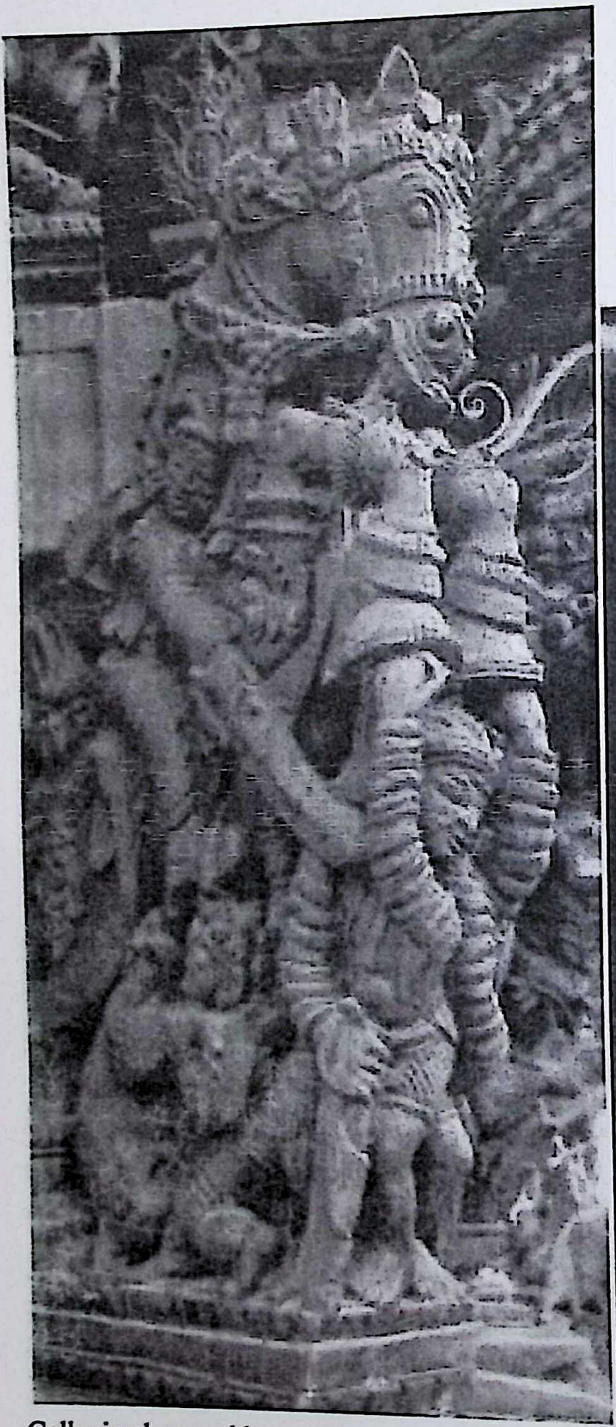
Upholding the world's inconscient unity



The corner of the ratham dedicated to Thirukameswara (Shiva) of Villianur in Pondicherry. The design and ornamentation is different and very elaborate with no vacantspace.

A memory quivered in the heart of Time

Animals, Yazlis and some mythological figures on the Devaratham

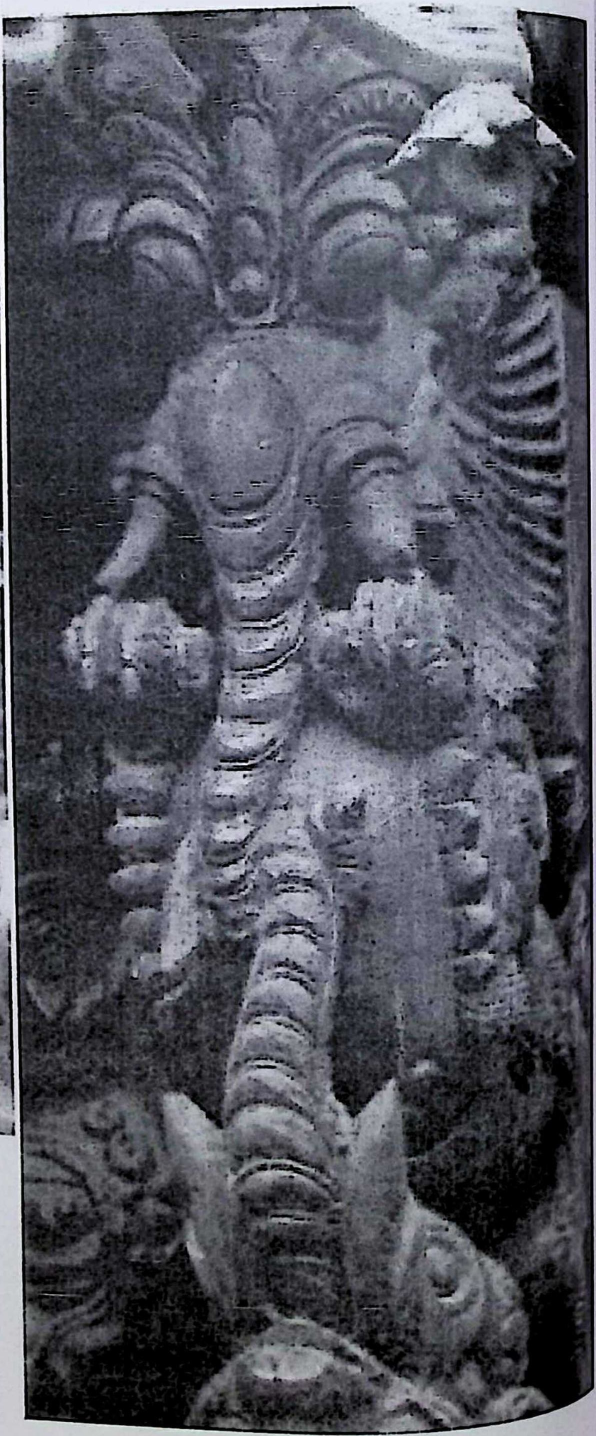


Galloping horse with a warrior

Patched not with failure bargain or compromise.

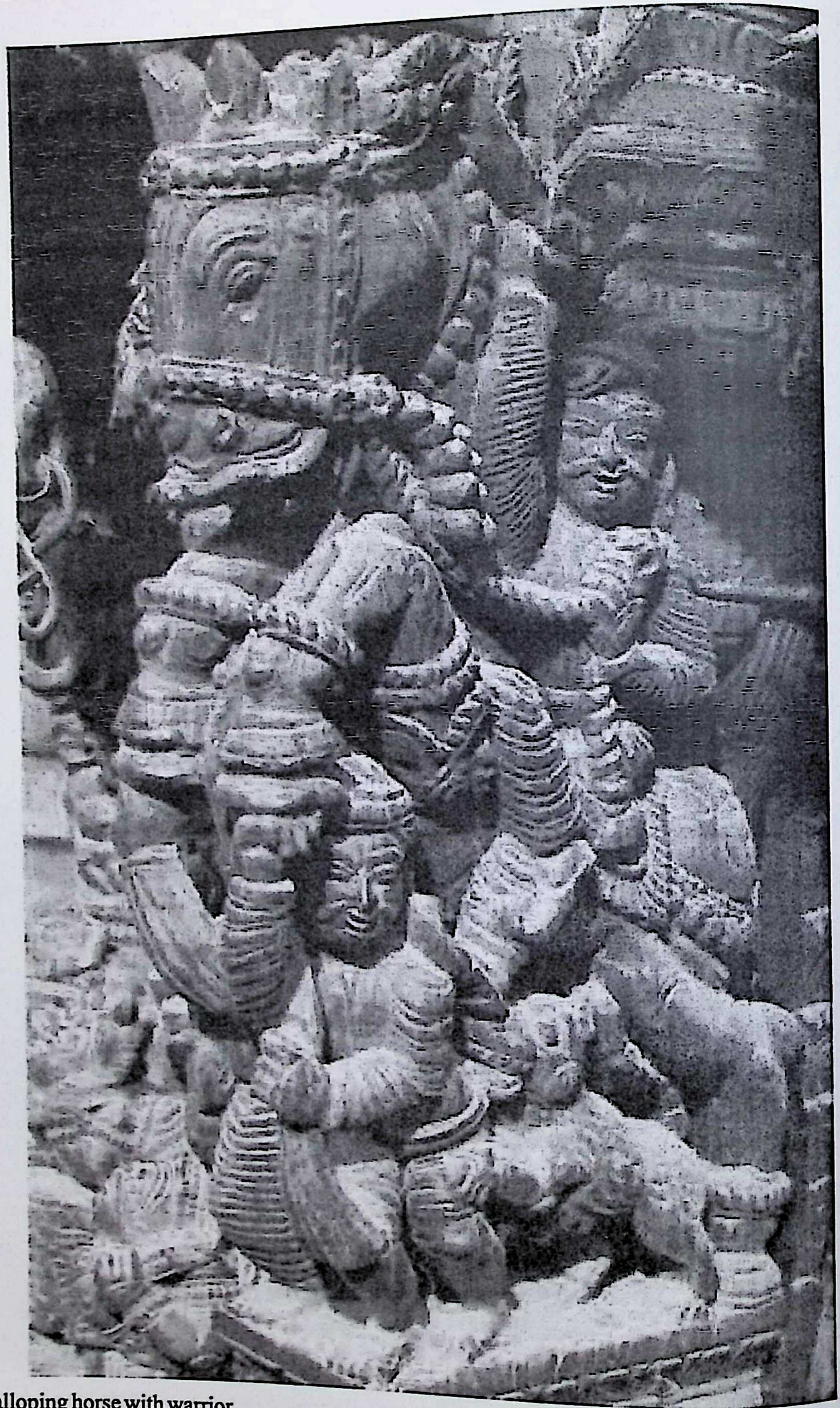
Yails

At travail in the occult womb of life,



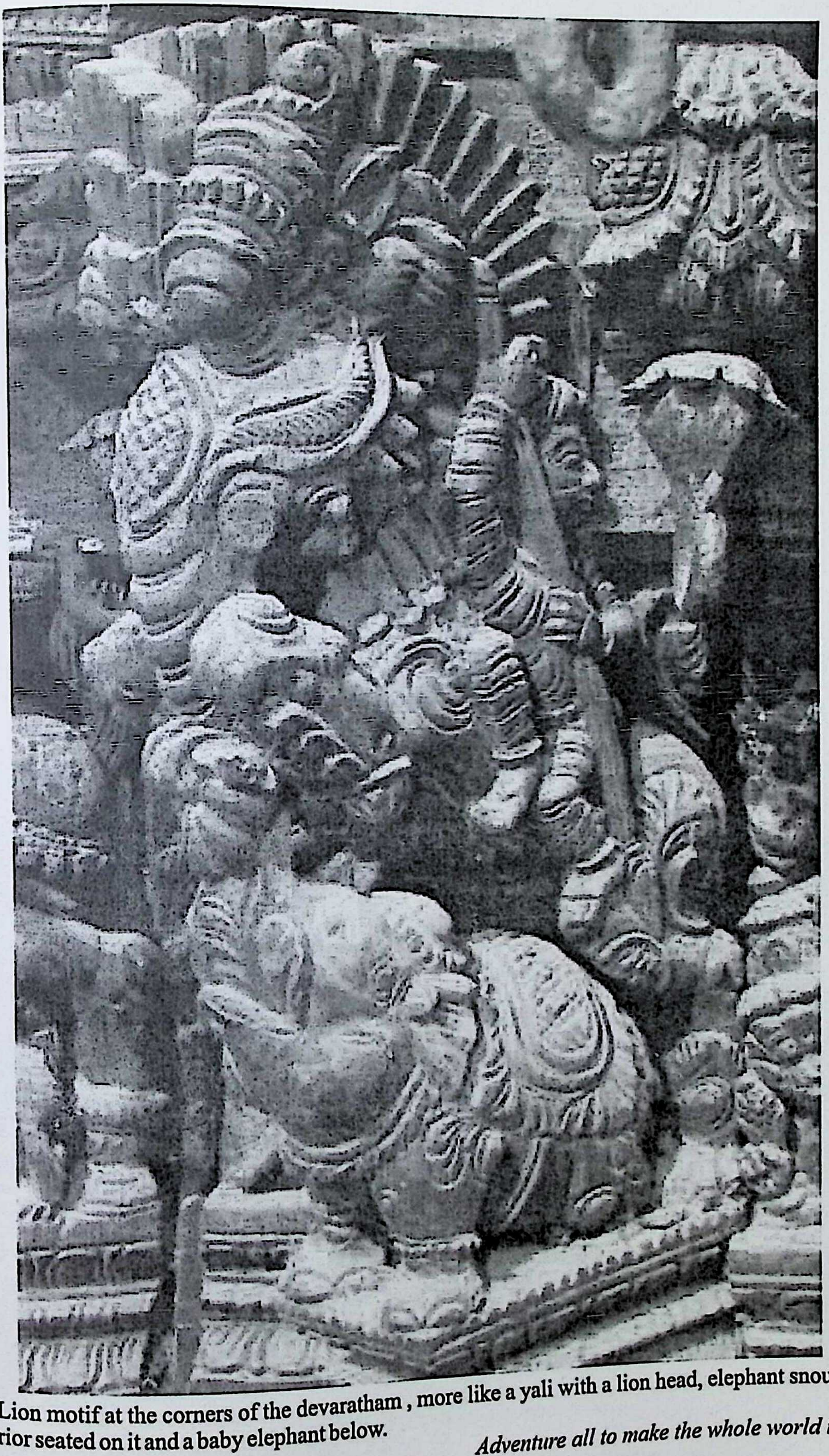
Pointing their spears through the infinitudes:

Warrior on a Yali



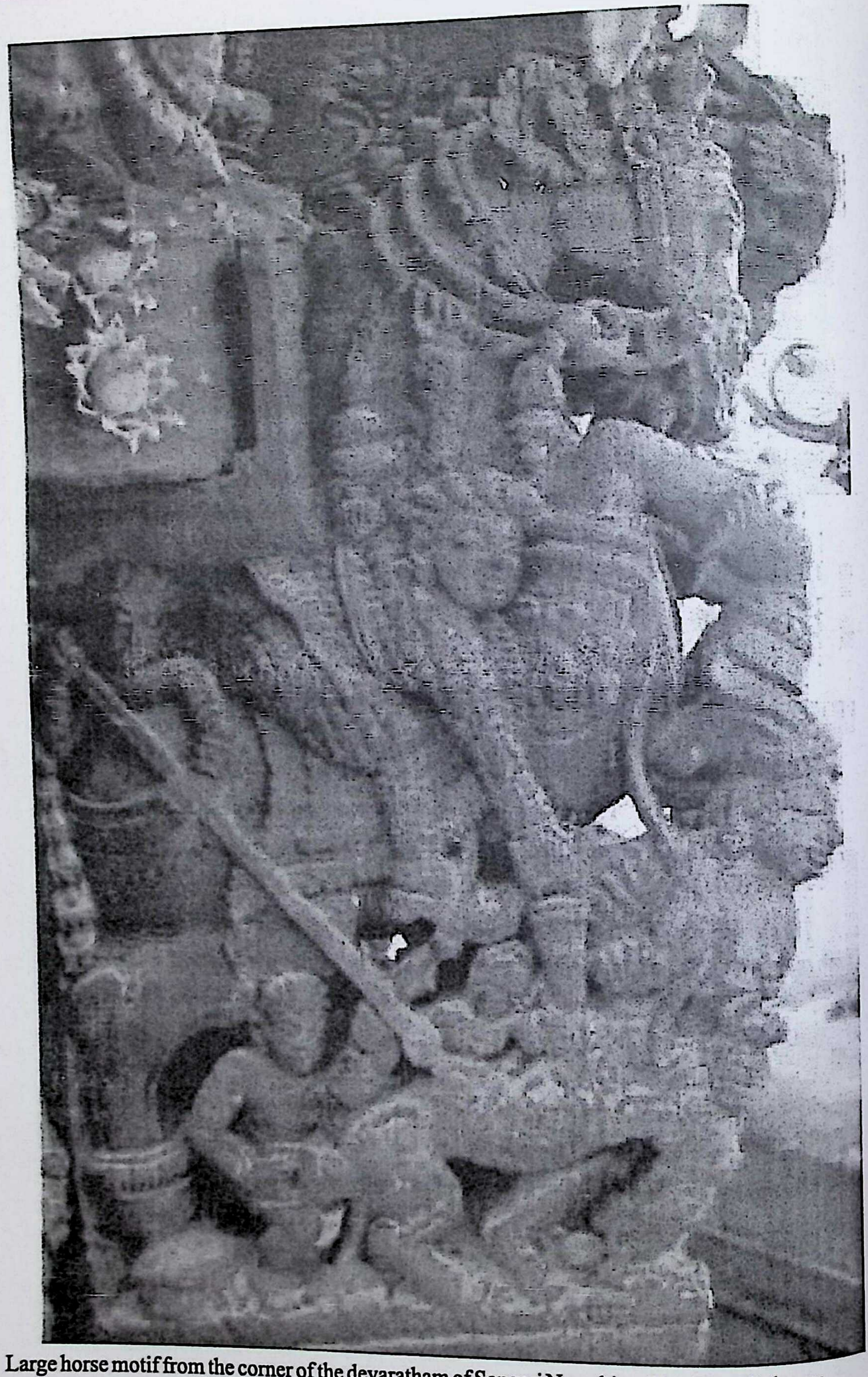
Galloping horse with warrior.

Always he journeys, but nowhere arrives;



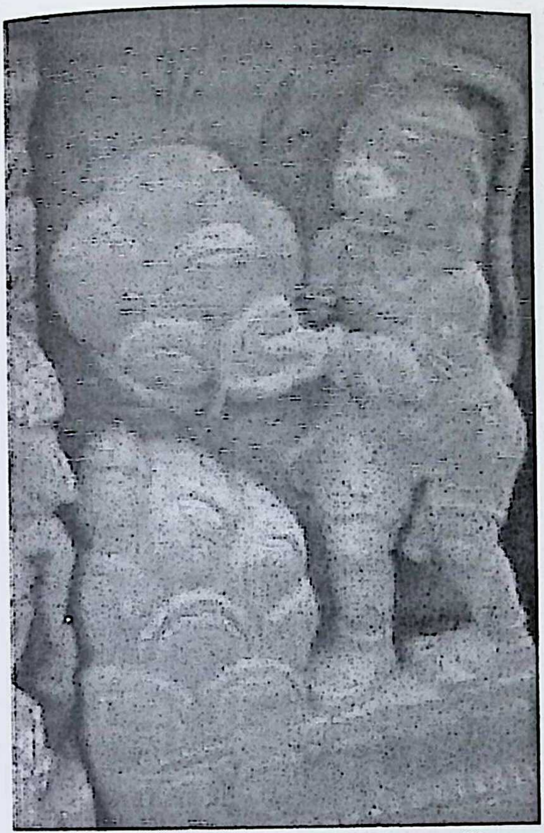
Lion motif at the corners of the devaratham , more like a yali with a lion head, elephant snout and warrior seated on it and a baby elephant below.

Adventure all to make the whole world thine,

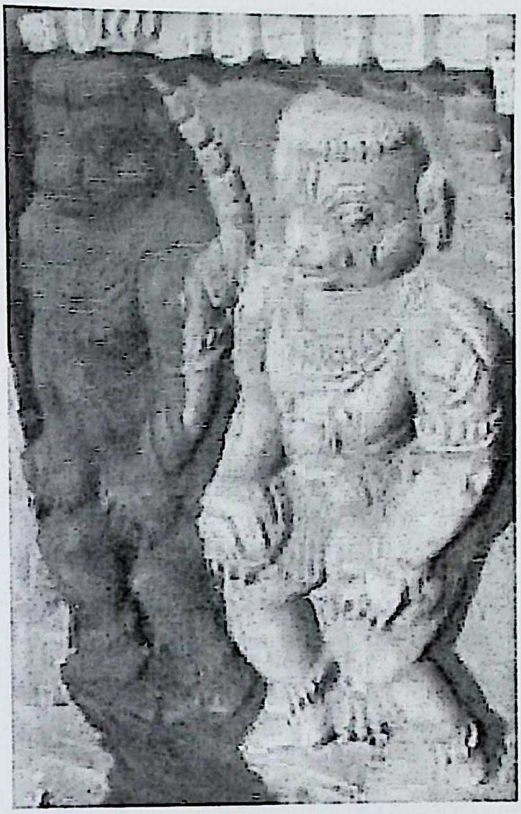


Large horse motif from the corner of the devaratham of Sengeri Narashima Kovil Pondicherry

The heaven-hints that invade our earthly lives,

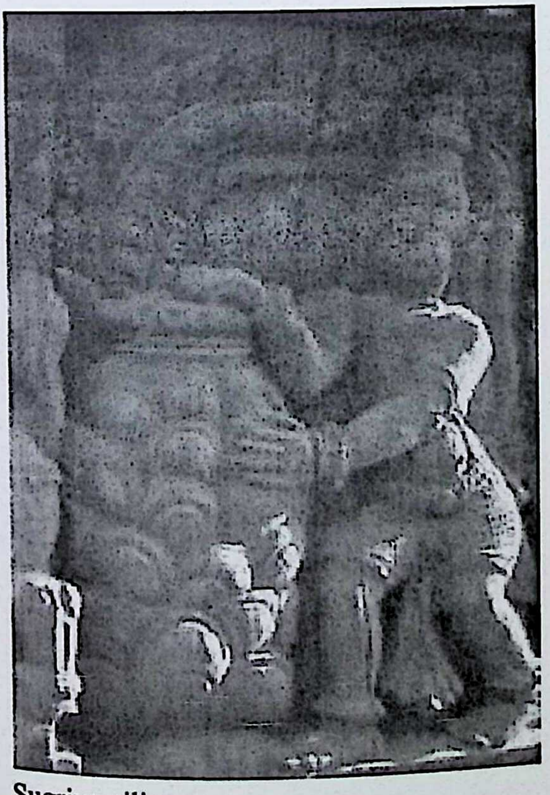


The monkey devotee of SriRama piling up stone to make the bridge Sethu Bandha.



Other helpers

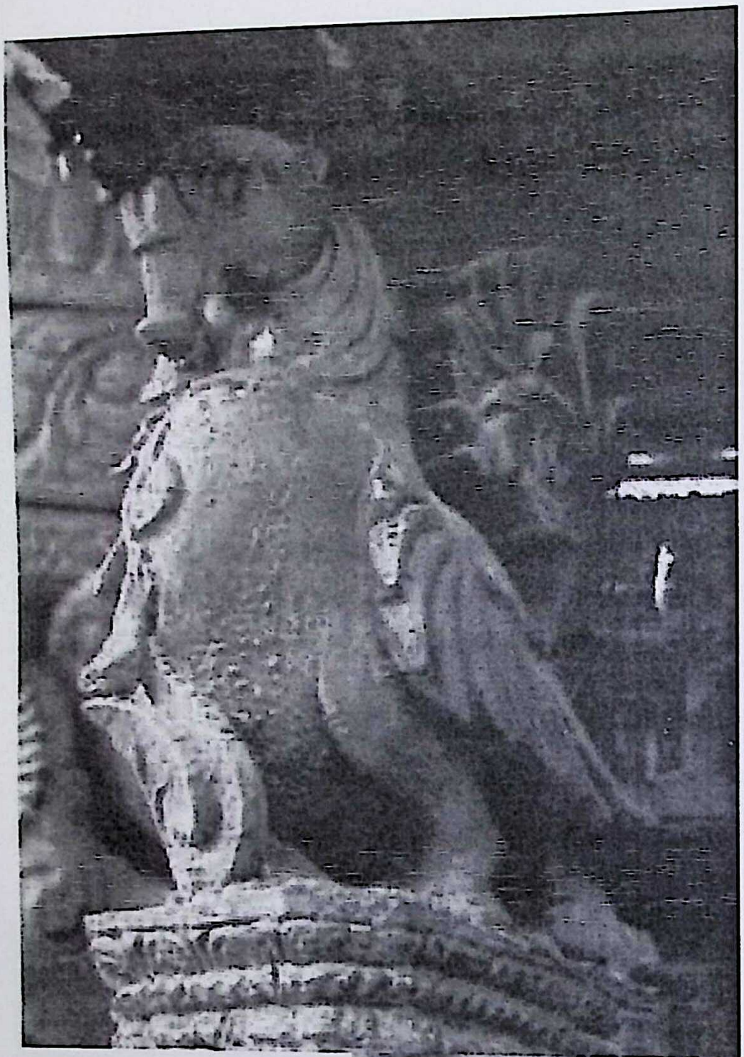
A dual Nature covered the Unique



Sugriva piling up

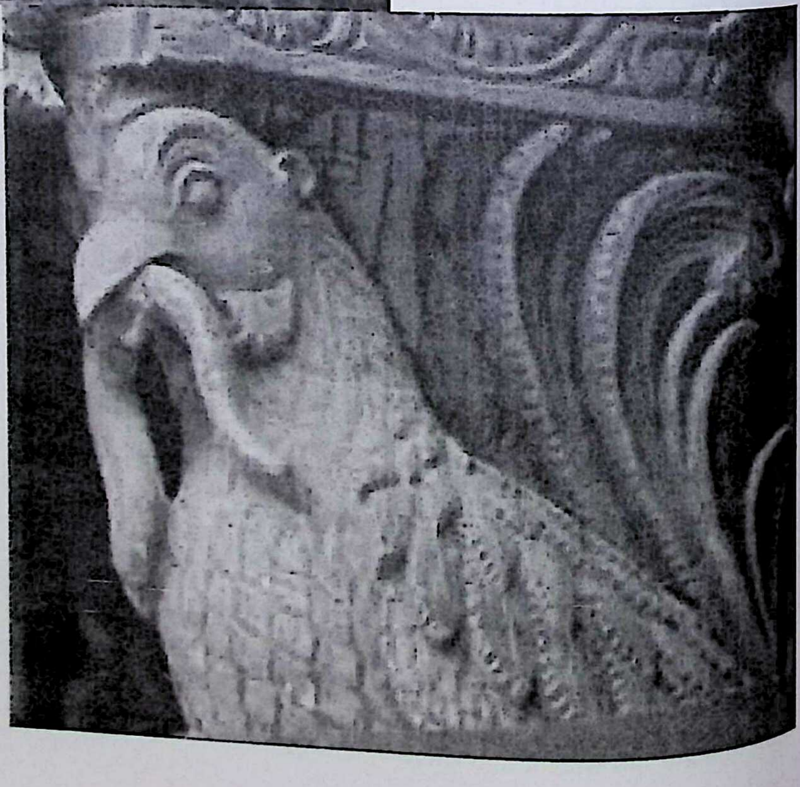
Sugriva's associates

That mightiness assumed a symbol form:



The Swan

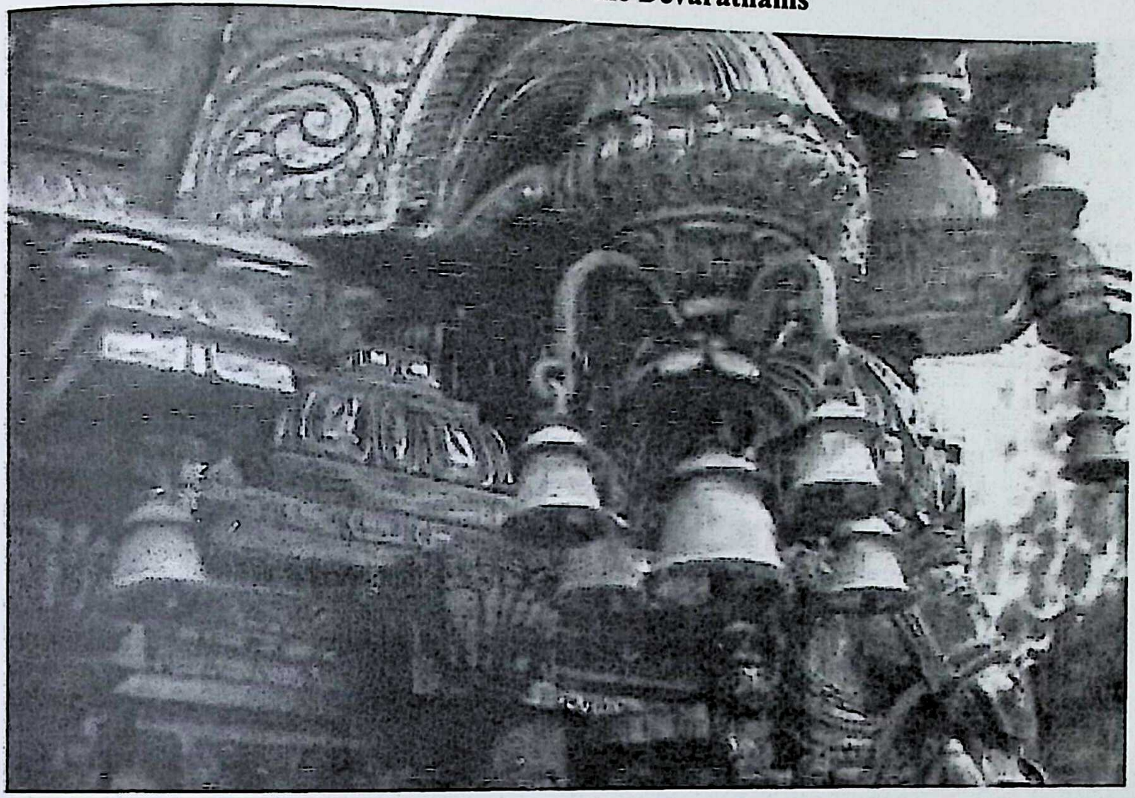
O Soul who flutterest to escape my net?



The Kite (garuda) carrying a Snake

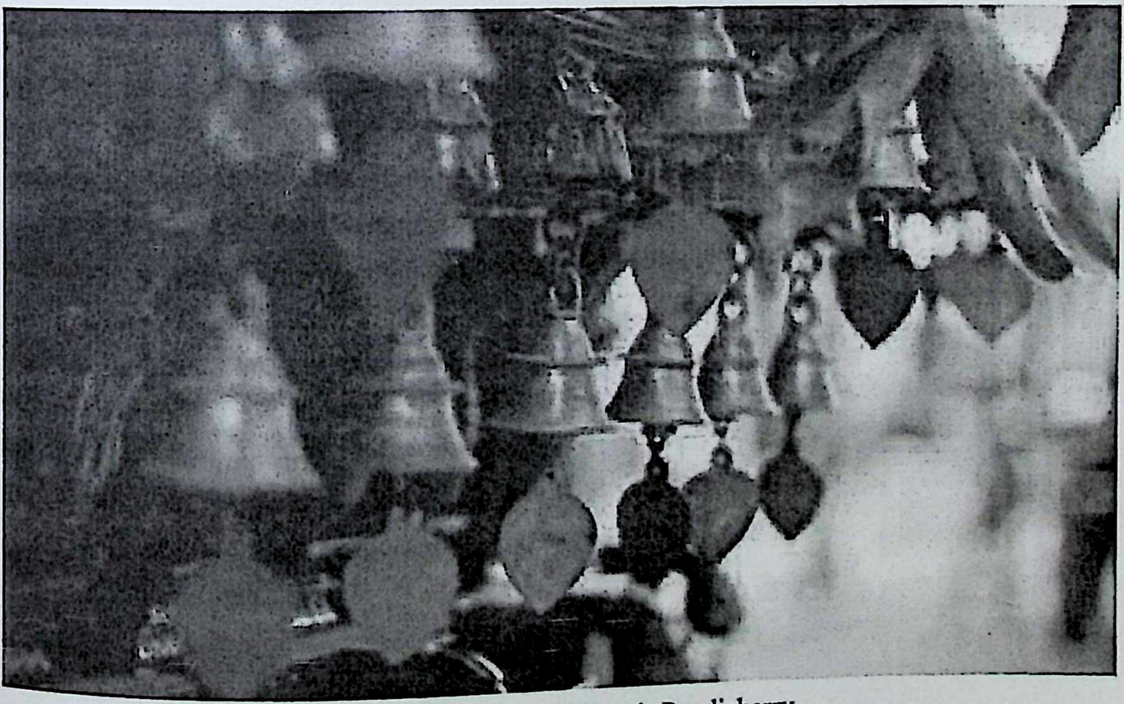
And life is a continual worship's rist,

The Divine Bell on the Devarathams



The Divine Bell - The bells hanging from the devaratham of the Shiva temple at Avinashi near Coimbatore in Tamilnadu.

And make dumb Matter conscious of its God.



Row of bells with projected leaf like hangings in a ratham in Pondicherry

And quivers inwardly with mystic rain

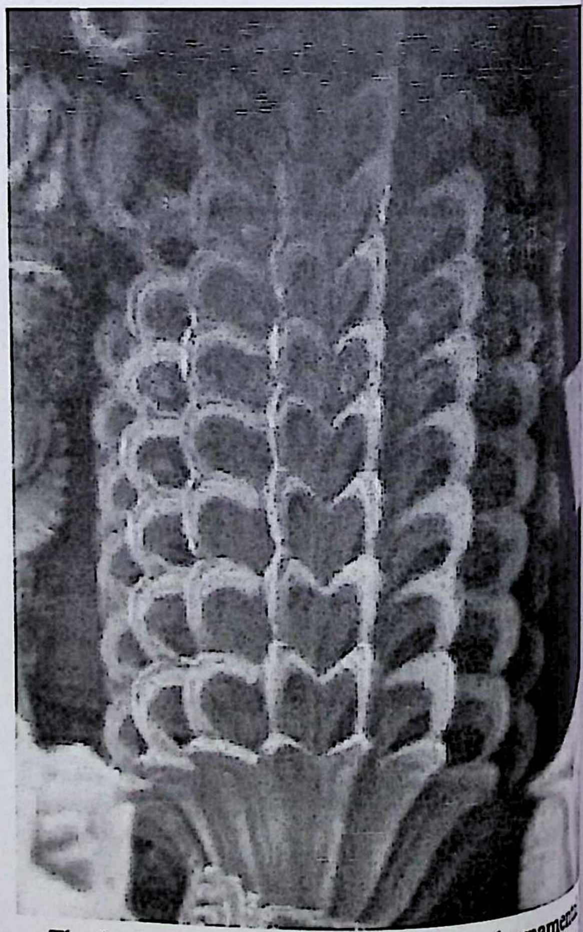
Ornamental decoration on the Devaratham

Gold colored ornamentation on a very old (about 300 years) ratham recently discovered in Pondicherry.

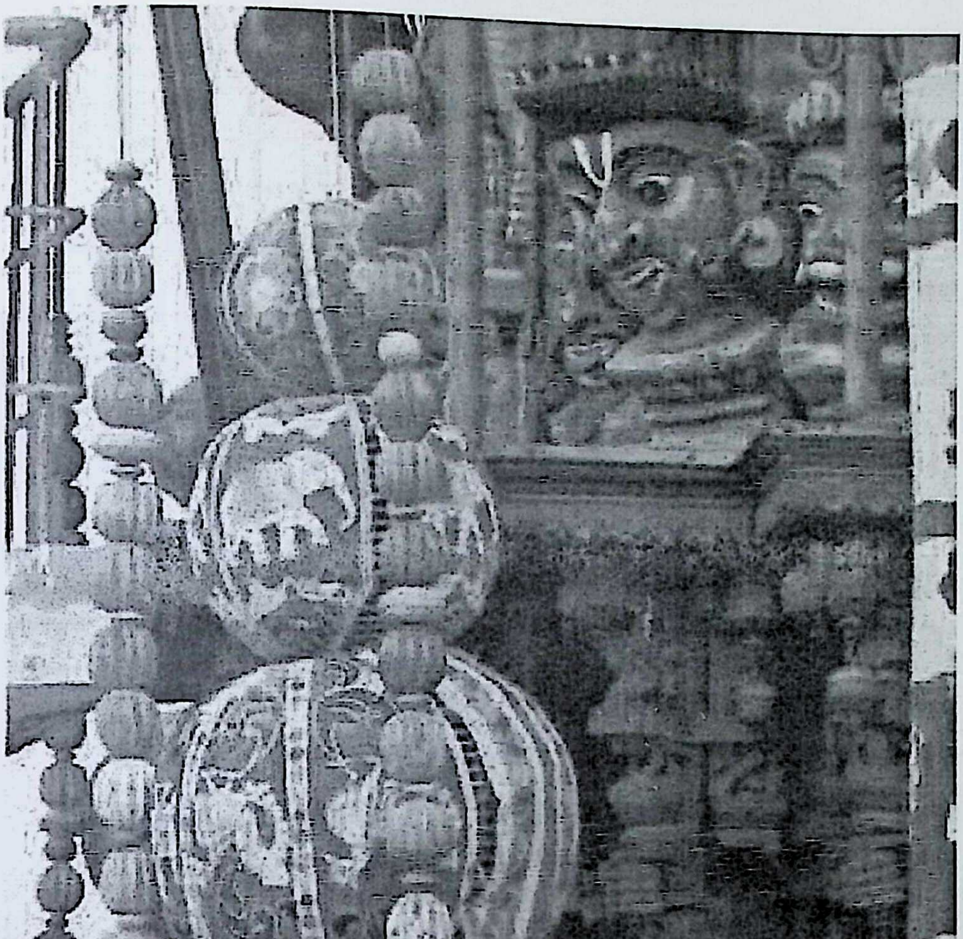
That with a little happiness is content,

The flying vidyadhara on the vimana of a devaratham

A body instinct with hidden divinity



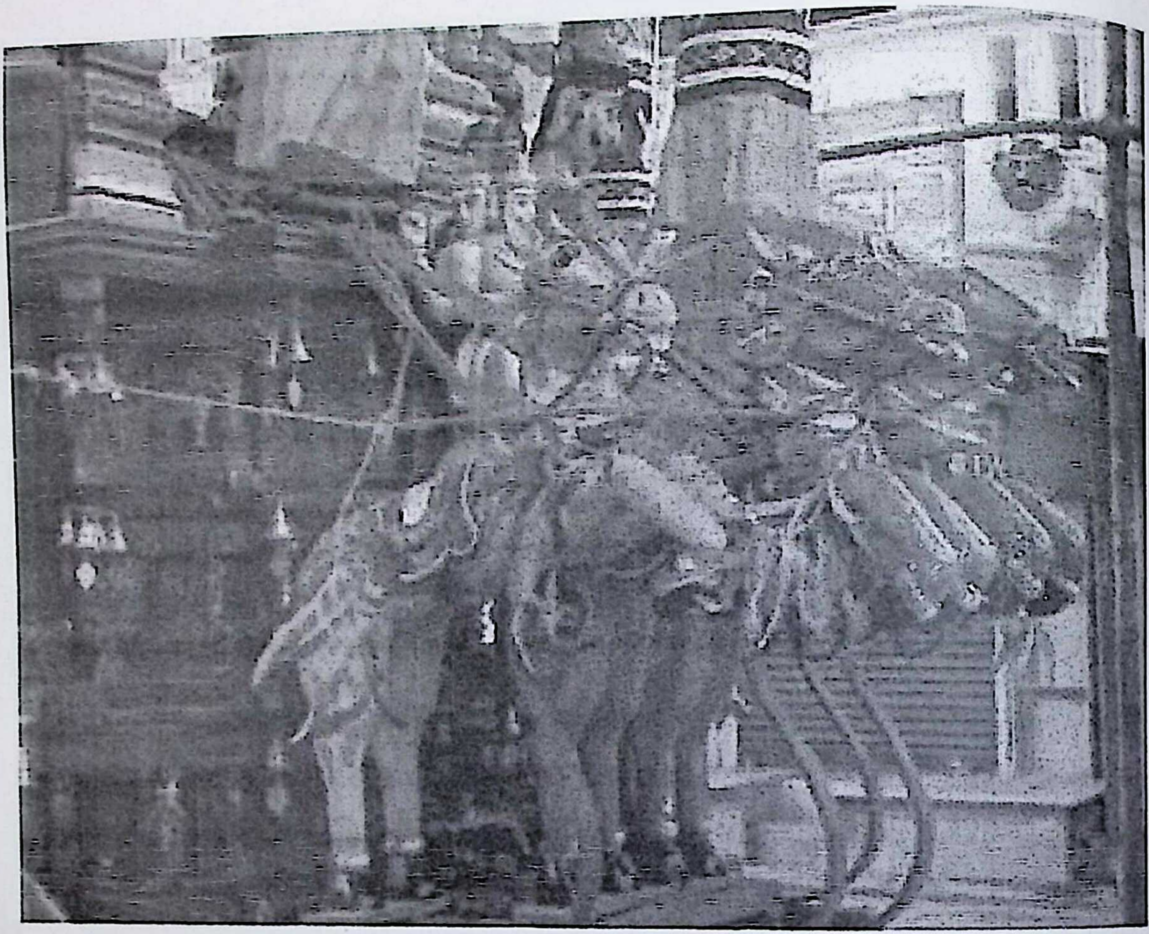
The finely carved and intricately designed ornamental decoration on the devaratham to fill up spaces



DECORATIONS

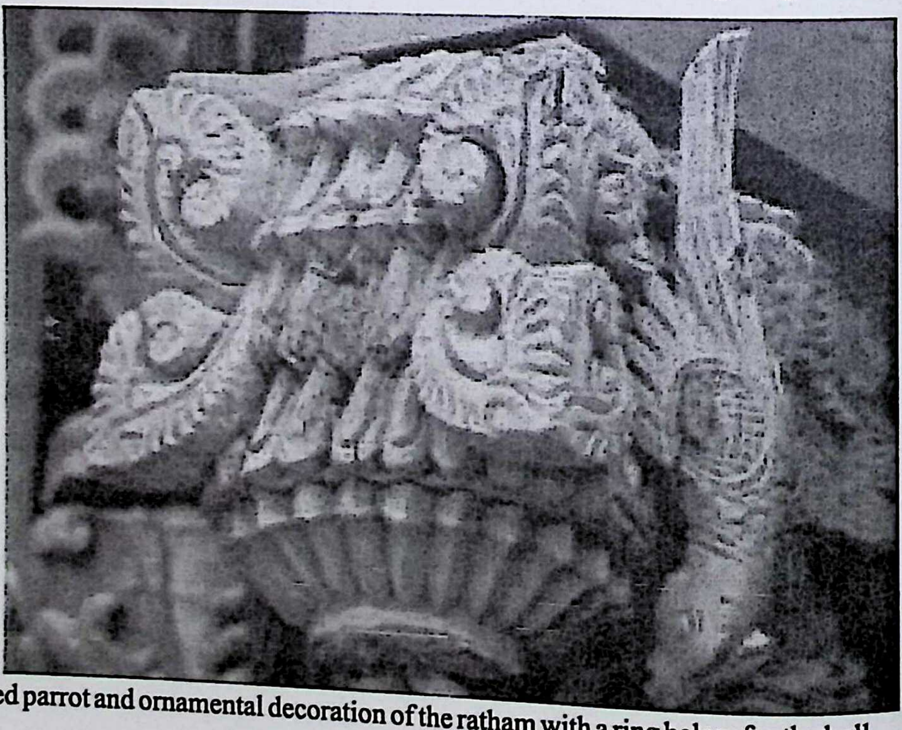
There are several decorations done on devaratham. On this ratham dedicated to the shakti koil at Veerapatinam in Pondicherry we see beautiful colorful large beads hanging like garlands. There are large spherical decorative hangings made up from bamboo and covered by colorful applique cloths depicting the flowers, horses, swan, peacock and other animals. The face of the bhootagana (shiva gana) in deep blue color is seen.

By which the spirit awake in Matter winds



The Veerapatinam ratham front is seen with colorful horses in galloping posture with the charioteer brahama's face just visible, many bells are also seen hanging all around the ratham

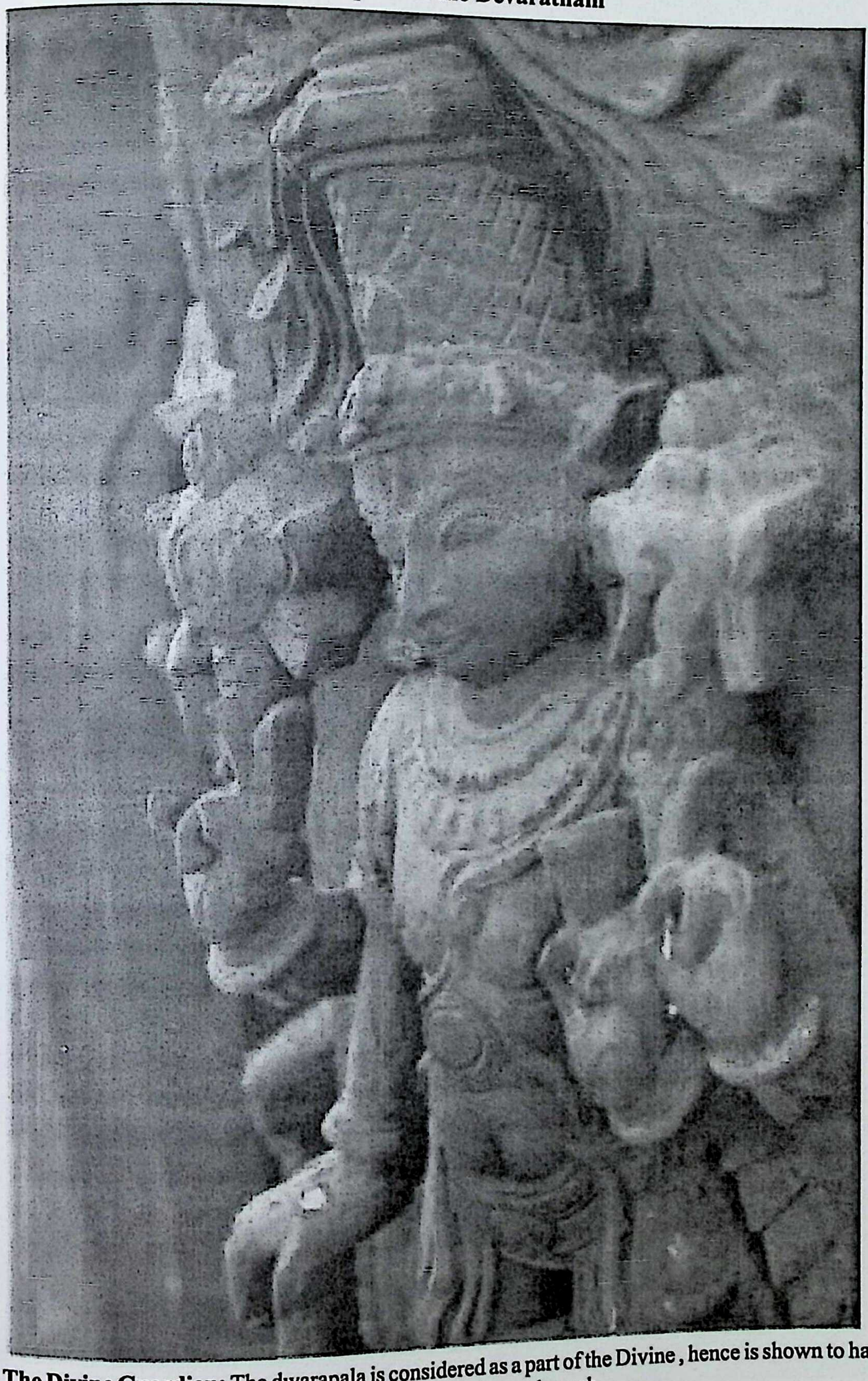
Recovering wings that cross infinity



The inverted parrot and ornamental decoration of the ratham with a ring below for the bell.

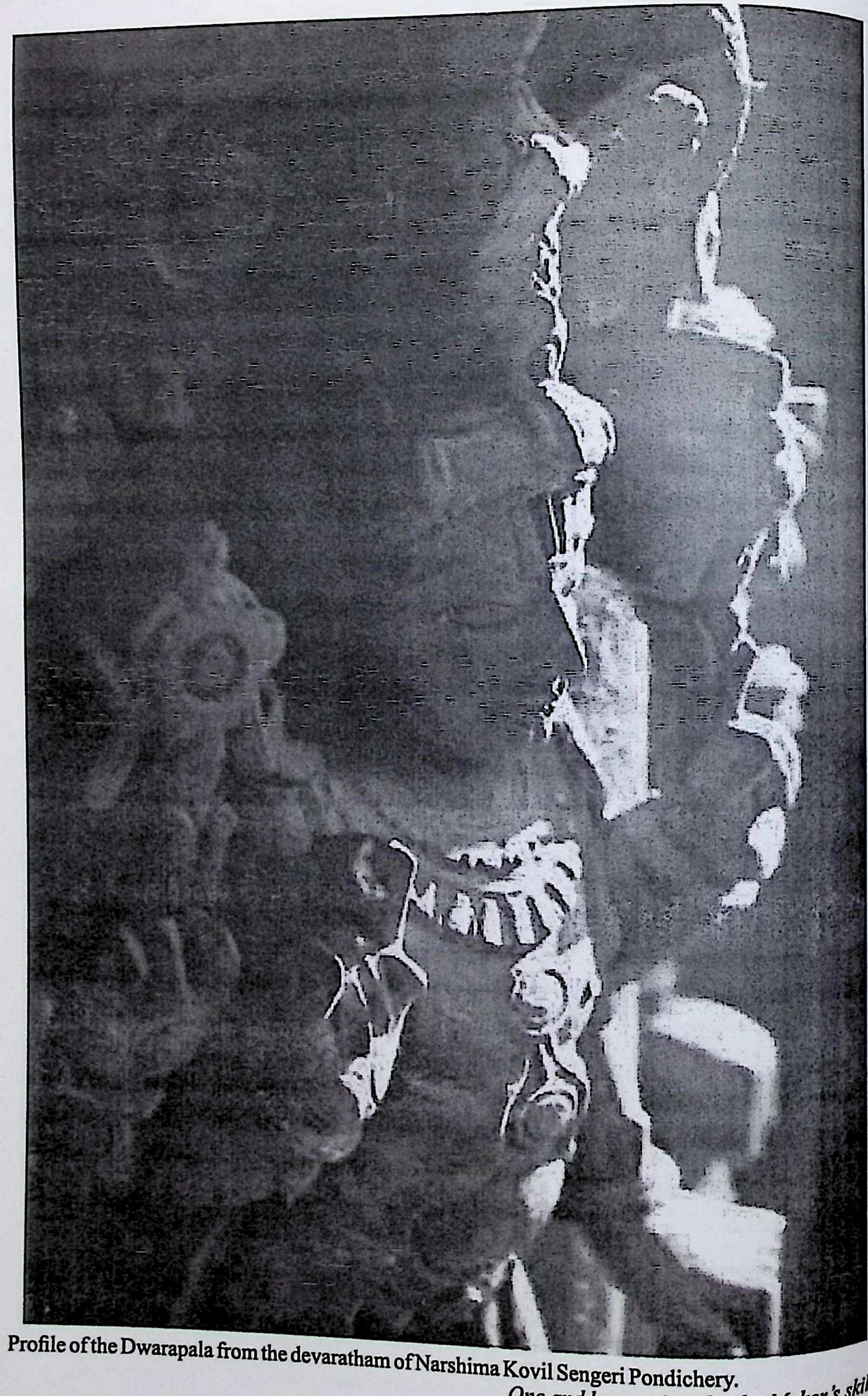
In street and house in councils and in courts

Dwarapala on the Devaratham



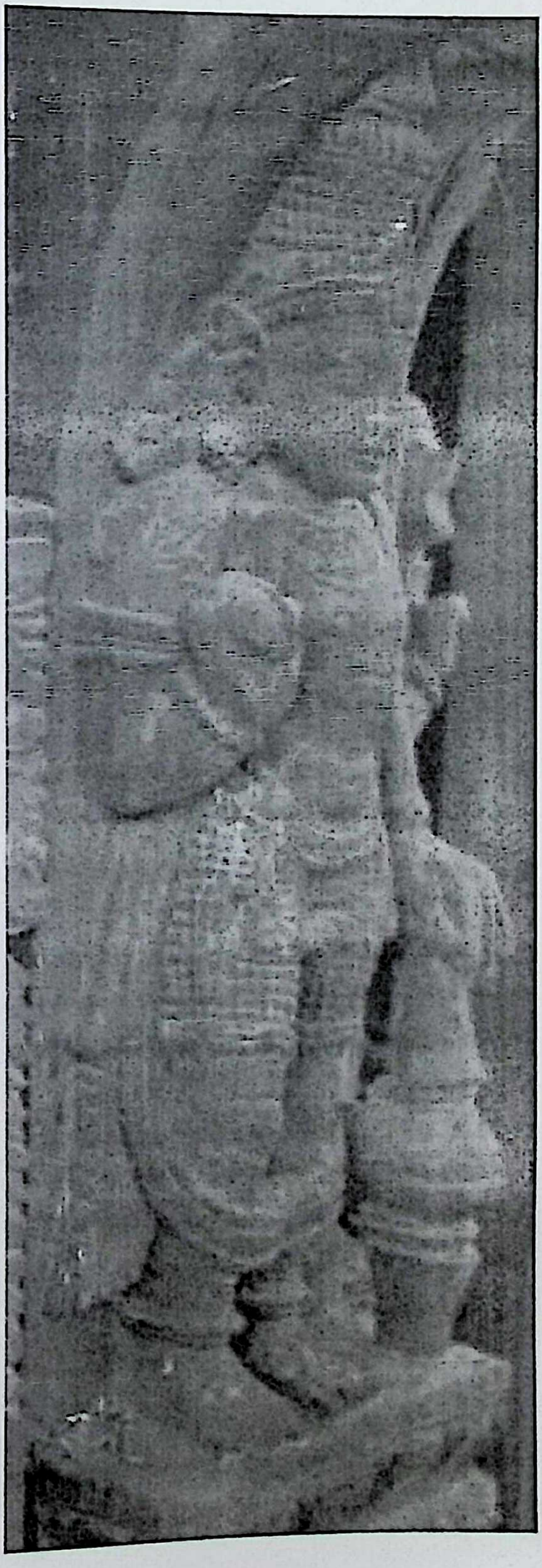
The Divine Guardian: The dwarapala is considered as a part of the Divine, hence is shown to have the same symbols as that of the lord, holding the mace, disc and conch.

A conscious frame was here, a self-born Force.



Profile of the Dwarapala from the devaratham of Narshima Kovil Sengeri Pondichery.

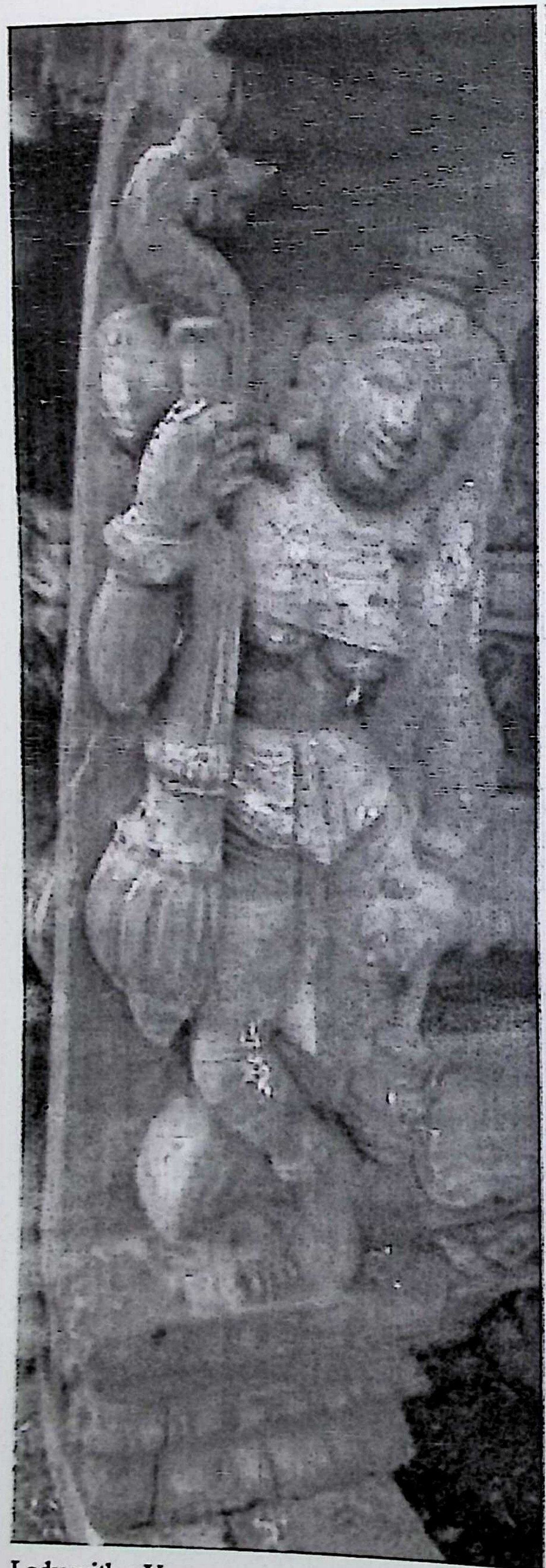
One and harmonious by the Maker's skill.



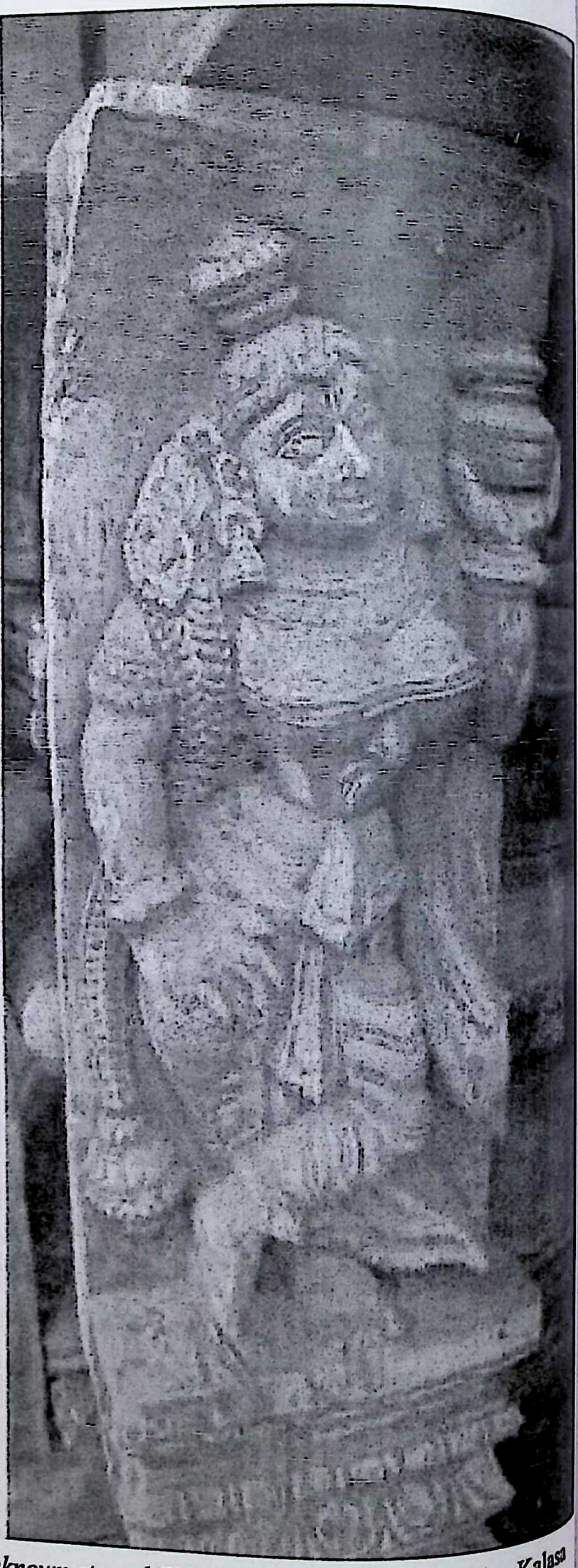
Dwarapala shown at different levels in the devaratham, holding the disc and the conch as well as the mace , along with well decorated crown, wearing finely made ornaments standing in samabhanga.

Accustomed to the eternal and the true,

Divine attendants on the Davaratham

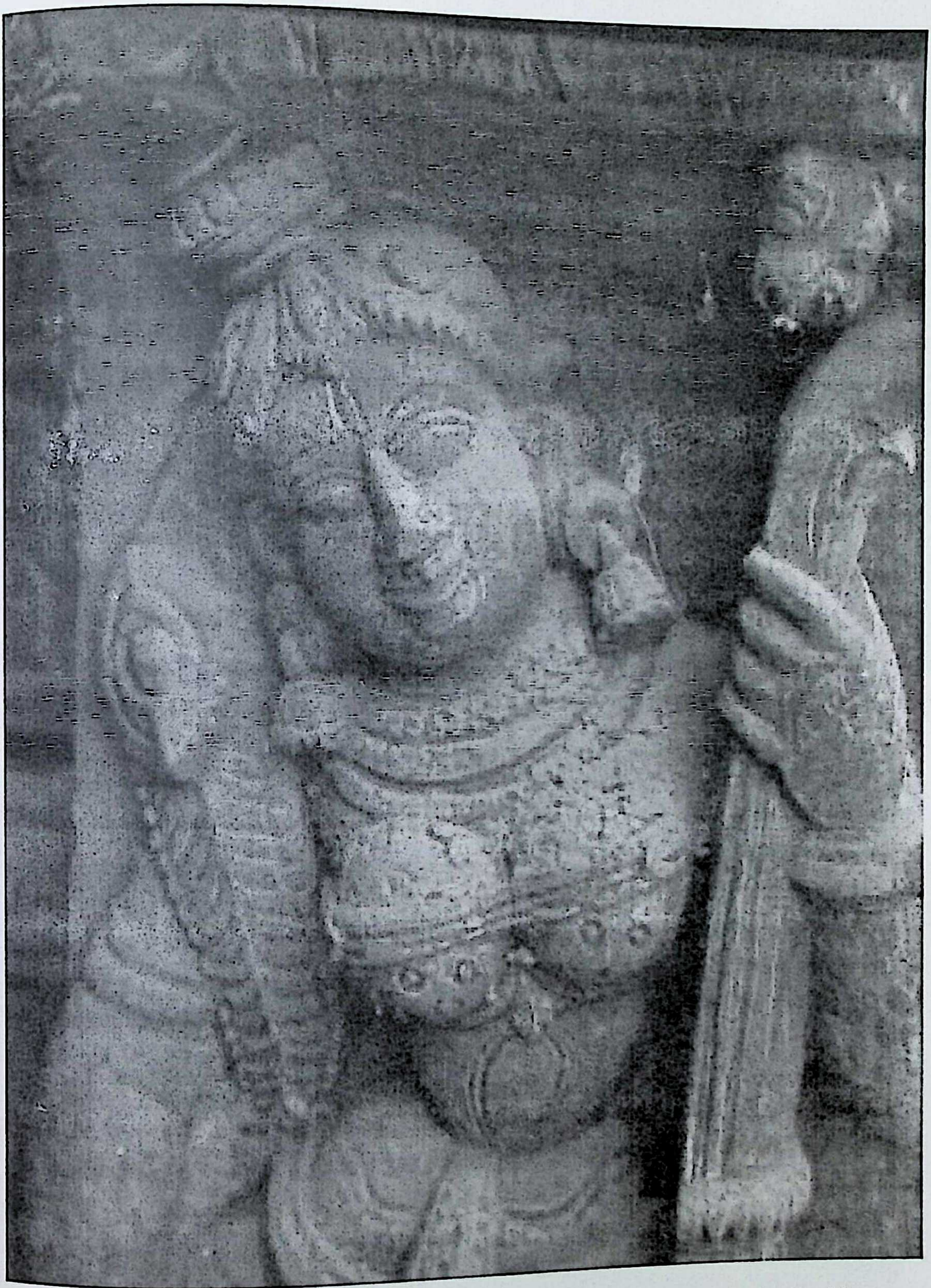


Lady with a Veena



Awaiting the unknown eternal Will.

Lady with a Kalasa



Lady holding the Veena

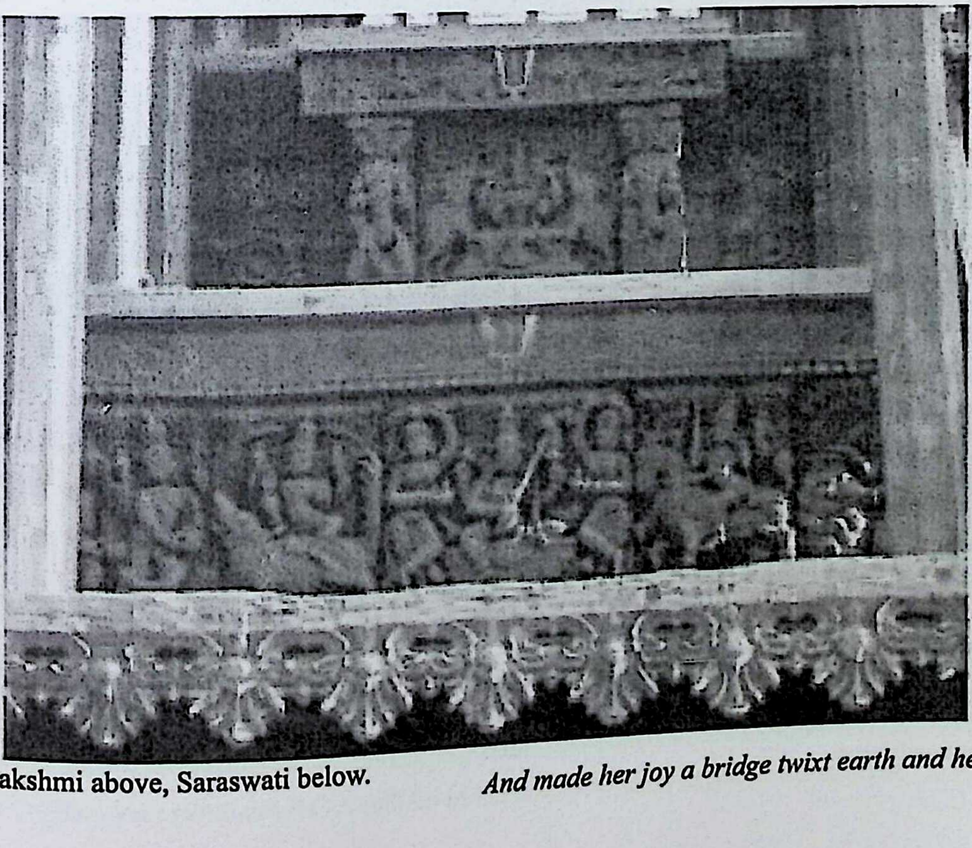
To open to Light the eyes that could not see,

Female attendent.

The vast universal suffering feel as thine:

Rolling female devotee at the base of the ratham of the Veerapatinam shakti temple.

Always, delivered from the grasp of Time?



Gaja-Lakshmi above, Saraswati below. *And made her joy a bridge twixt earth and heaven,*

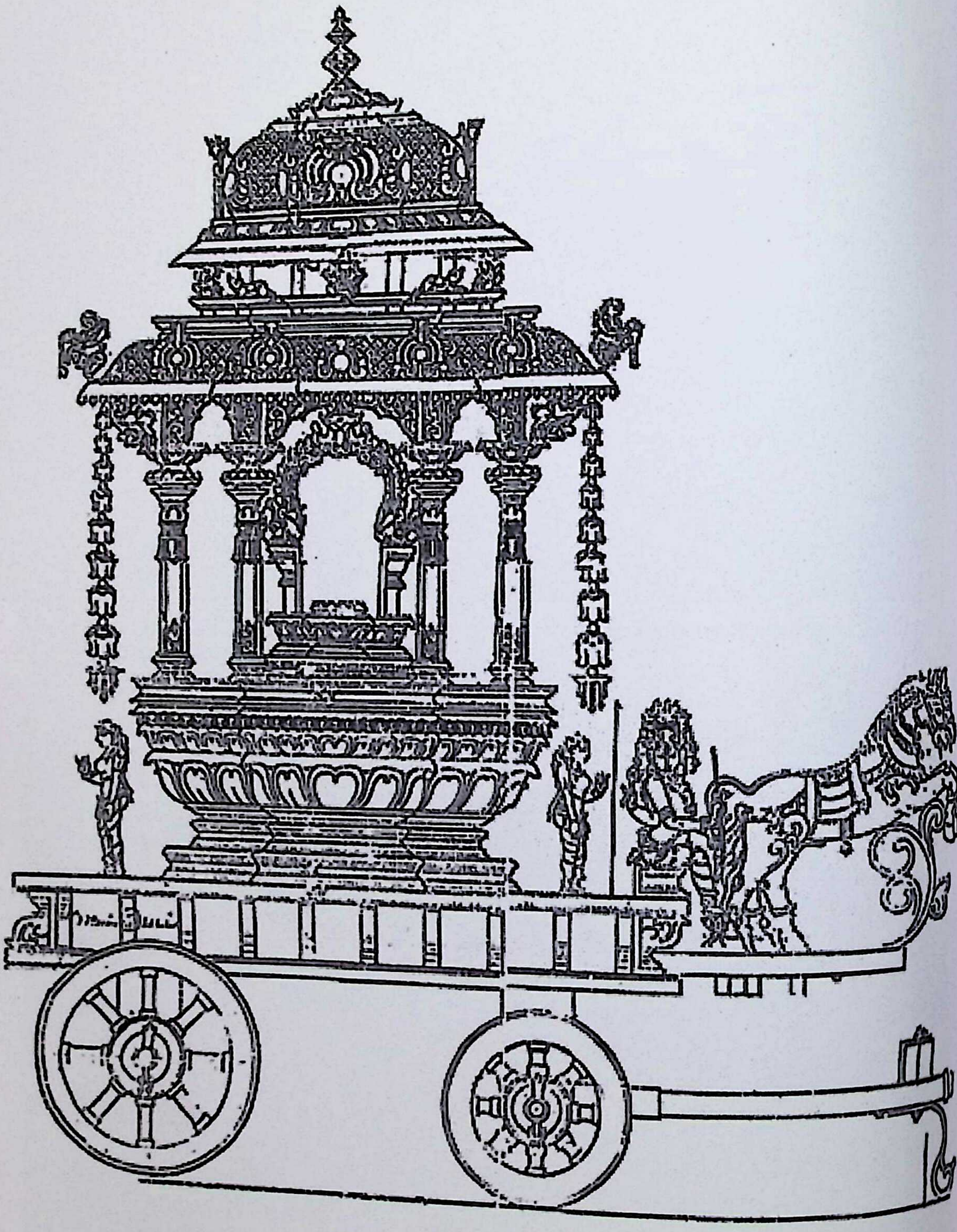
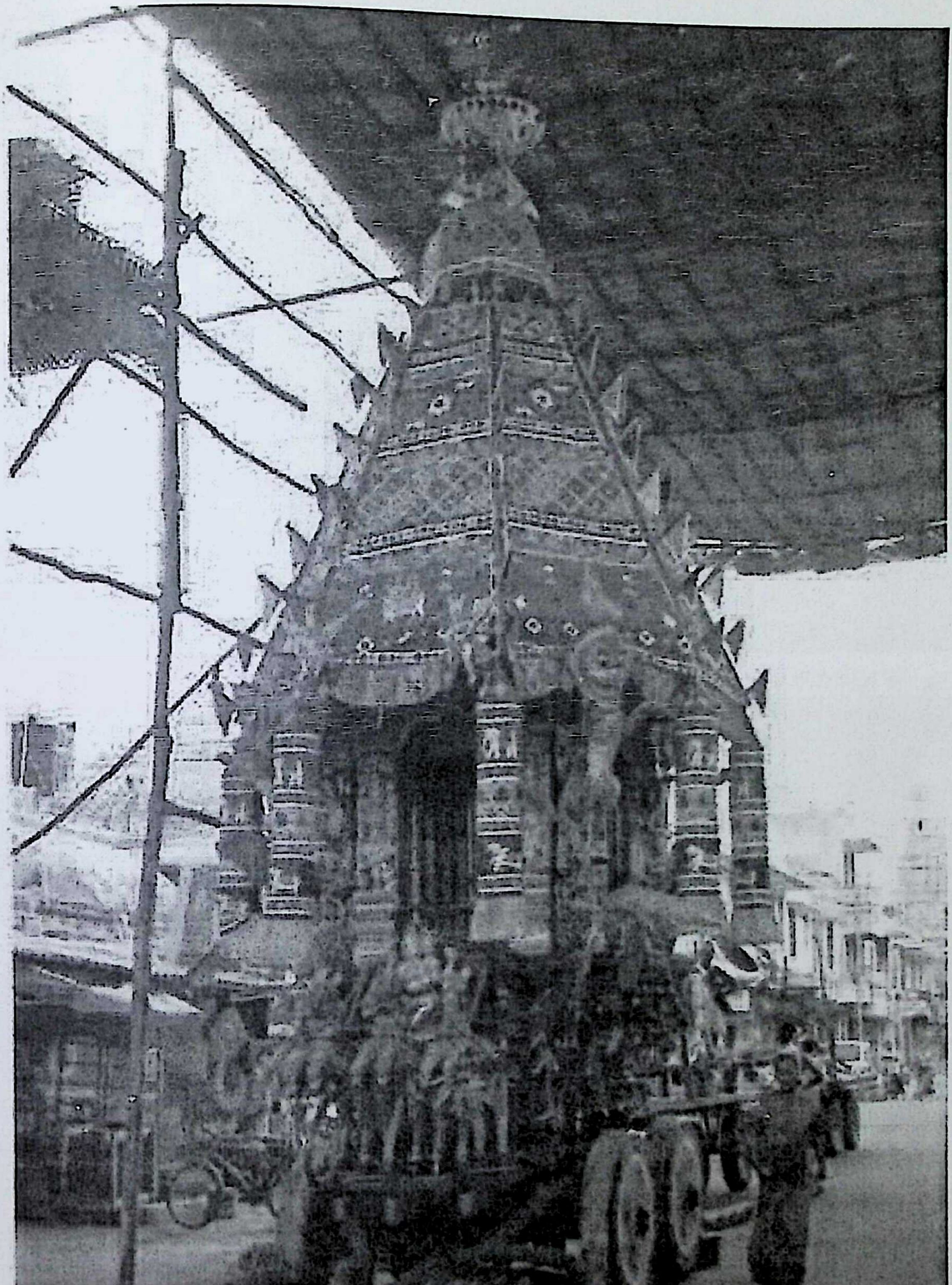
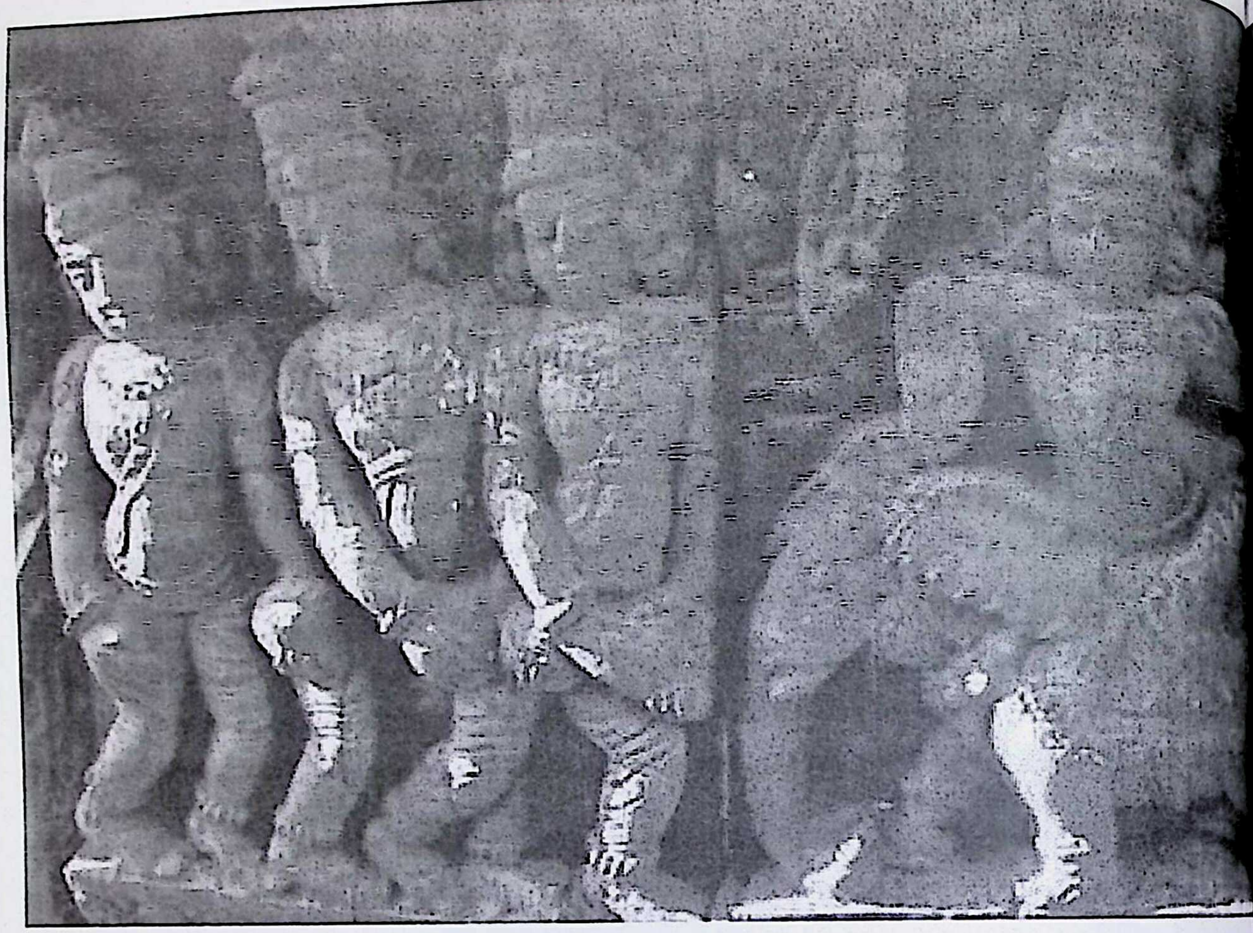


Figure 22

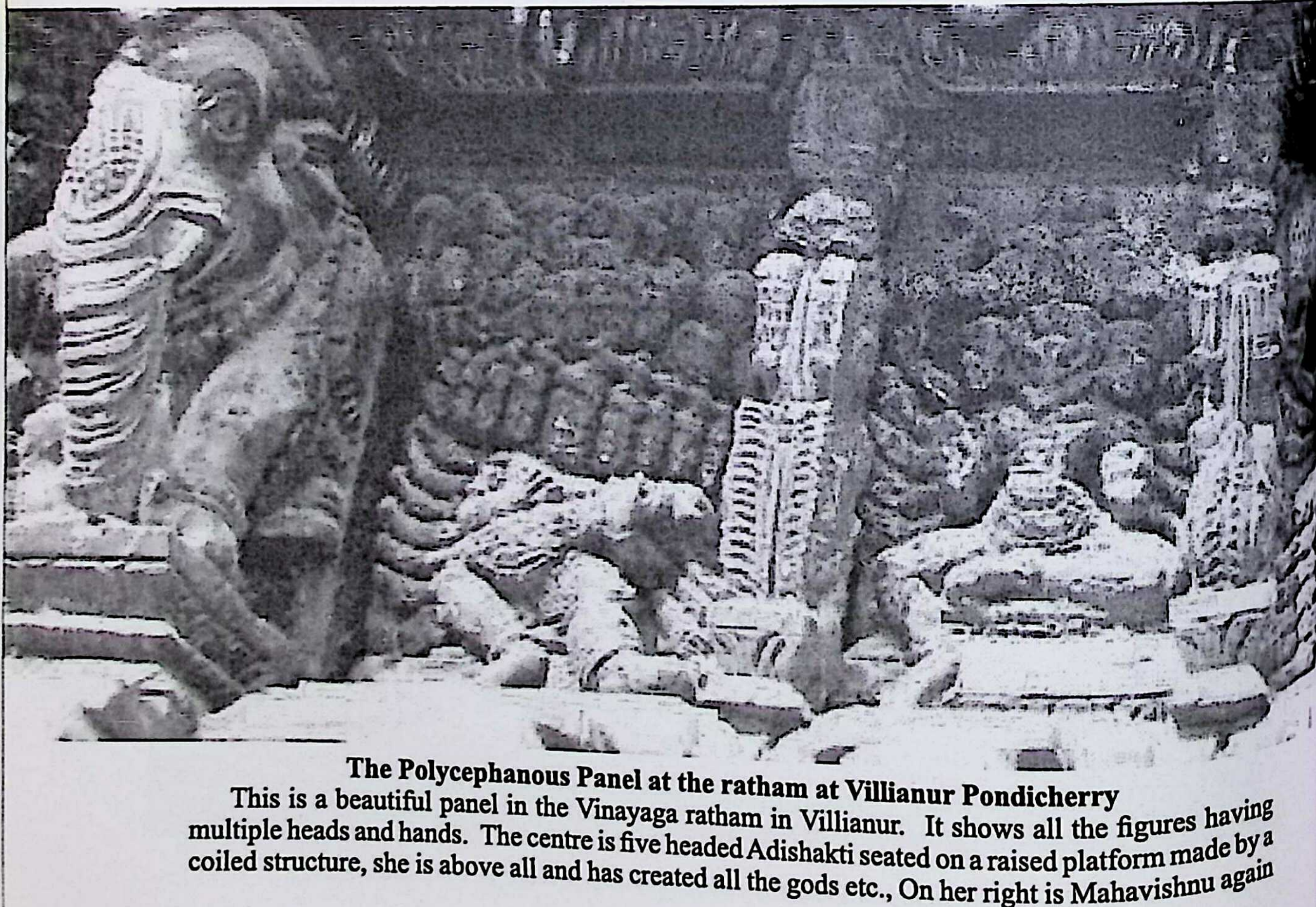
An elaborately decorated devaratham with finely carved pillars, three tier devasthana, hanging yalis, chouli bearers all around, sarathi, horses on extended platform, beautifully carved vimana with kalasa on the top.



The Veerapattinam shakti ratham of Pondicherry just a day after the festival.



Marvelling at life and earth they saw truths far.



The Polycephanous Panel at the ratham at Villianur Pondicherry

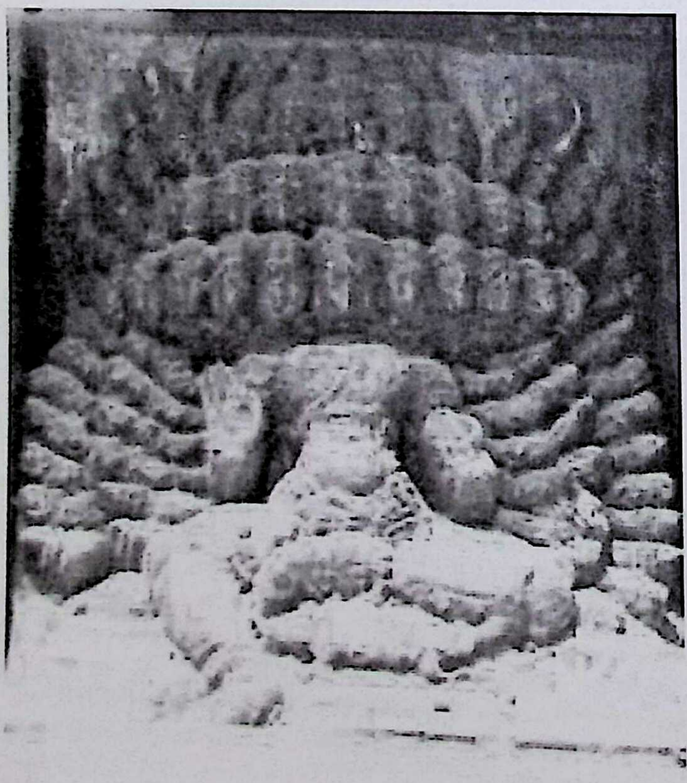
This is a beautiful panel in the Vinayaga ratham in Villianur. It shows all the figures having multiple heads and hands. The centre is five headed Adishakti seated on a raised platform made by a coiled structure, she is above all and has created all the gods etc., On her right is Mahavishnu again

All schemed by law that God permits to life.

her right is Mahavishnu again five headed and on to extreme left is Ravana Playing the veena made for his own body parts to please Shiva, on to the right is Mahalakshmi and to her right is Mahasadashiva. Two calestial elephants are on the two sides and decorated hangings are above with rings to place bells during the festival. The yalis (one fallen off) are seen in between the figures and flower shaped decorations.

The Special Rathams

In this chapter I will briefly describe some of the rathams which have unique features rarely seen elsewhere. Only three of them are presented in this chapter as a representative sample. The **polycephanous** figures from the Vinayaga devaratham of the Thirukameswara Shiva temple at Villianur Pondicherry must be mentioned. The devarathams may rarely have one polycephanous image. But this small devaratham has a series of polycephanous images in a single ratham. This ratham is dedicated to Vinayaga and has a panel with five polycephanous figures in them. The first is Ravana as kailasha vahana murti. Ravana wanted to take Shiva and Parvati along with the Kailasha Mountain to his palace and to show his strength he attempted to lift the mountain. Shiva just pressed his toe to crush Ravana's attempt. Realising his mistake Ravana wanted to please Shiva. He cut his body parts to make a veena out of it and sing praises of the lord. This image may be formed as an independent vahana as in Chetty Kovil of Mission street Pondicherry. In this image Ravana is seen to have ten heads (one as a part of the Veena), twenty arms with many weapons, two hands which play the veena with the mount kailasha on the background. The significance of this presentation is that it reminds us that all that we achieve is only because of the grace of the Divine. The next image on the panel is Maha Vishnu



Mahashadashiva

He is shown to have twentyfive heads arranged in three layers and fifty hands seated in sukhasana with the front hands in Abhaya and Varada mudra. He is also belived to have given origin to the entire cosmos.

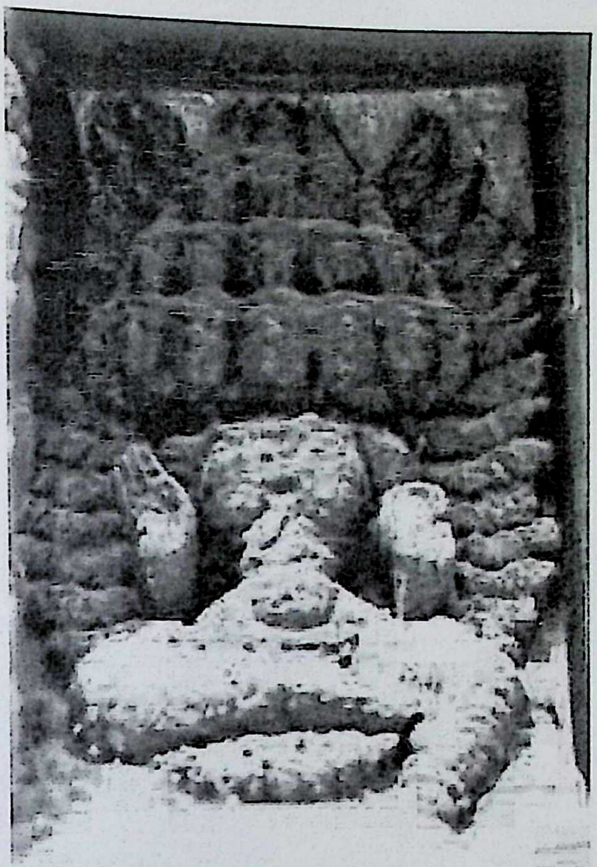
Had come enlarged out of eternity

Consort of Mahasadashiva

The mother of all gods and creatures. Some say she is Aaditi, while others call her as Maha Lakshmi. She has sixteen heads and thirty two arms symbolic of Sahashra shira and bhuja, thousand heads and hands to actually mean countless forms. All the creation and forms of life has been a part of her, she lets herself manifest in one and all.

The Mother of all godheads and all
strengths Who, mediatrix, binds earth
to the Supreme.

The secret caught of God's felicity.



Maha Vishnu:

Vishnu with a lion face at the centre and four more faces including that of a Gaja, a bull. It has twelve hands with hands in front in Abhaya and Varada mudra respectively. He is seated in sukhasana pose and has a very serene face.

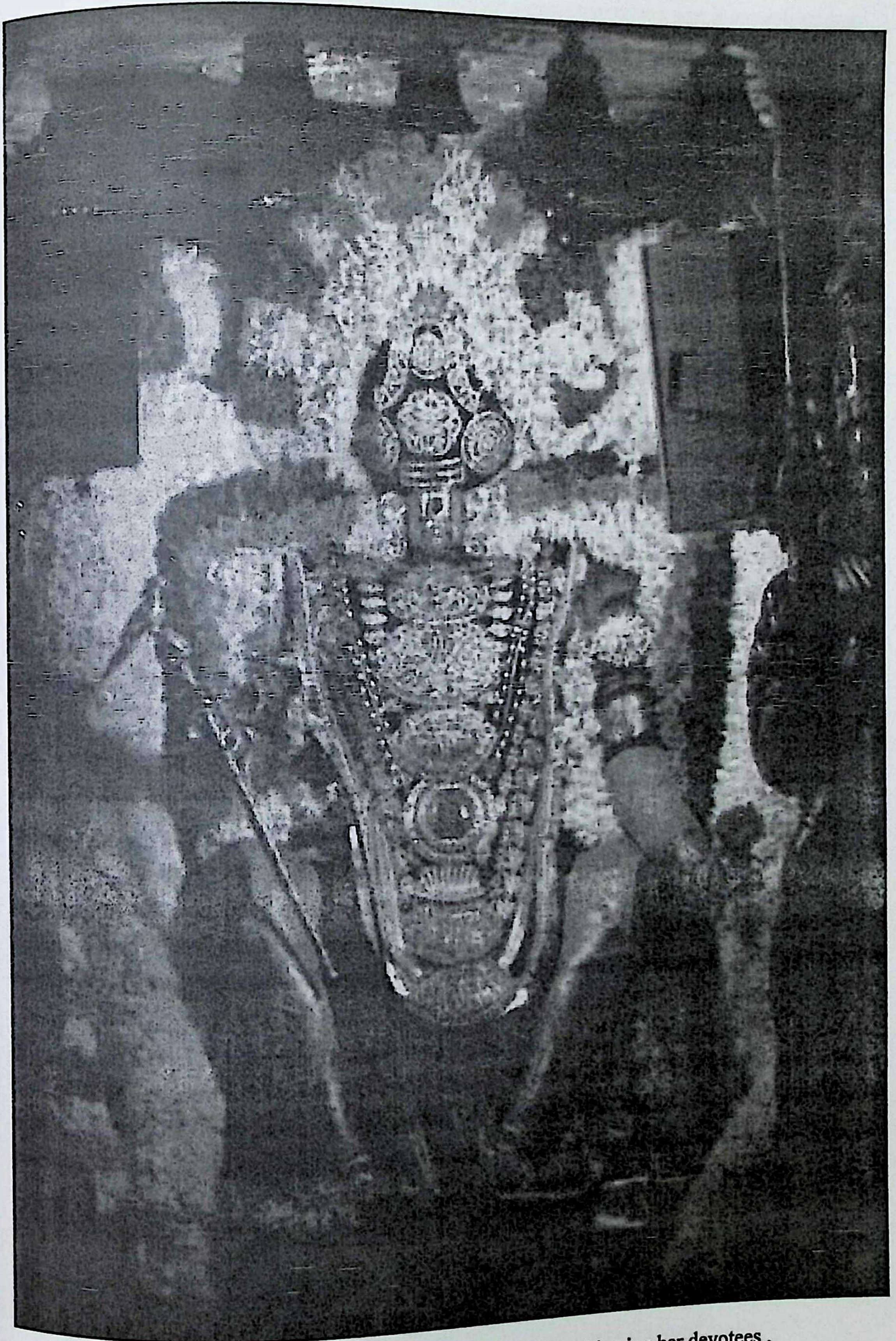
For one was there supreme behind the God.

Kailasa vahana

Ravana playing the veena carved out of his own body to please Lord Shiva. Ravana wanted to take Shiva along with mount Kailash to his palace and tried vainly to lift the mount Kailash, Shiva was angry and presseed his toe to thwart Ravana's attempt. Ravana realised his folly and wanted to please Lord Shiva and thus cut one of his head and other body parts to create the veena with his intestines as the strings and started to sing in praise of his lord. Here Ravana has nine heads and eighteen hands with the mount Kailash in the background. This form is also used as a vahana for Lord Shiva in many temples.

Knowledge and Ignorance could strive no more;

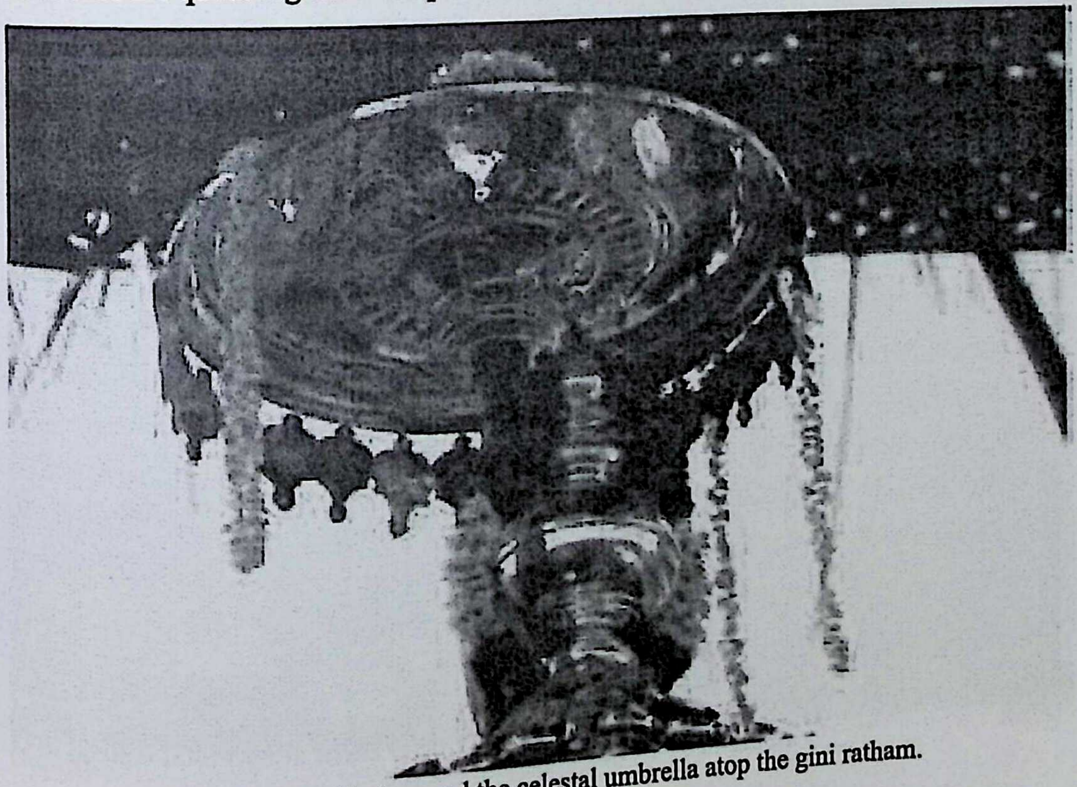
also sometimes called as Viratrupa of Vishnu, where he has five faces, the central image is lion faced like Narasimha, then gaja or elephant, and then ashwa or horse on either side there are two are human faces. He has twelve hands and front two are in abhaya and varada mudra. This is the symbolic representation of the Vishwarupa or the Viratrupa of Vishnu which he reveals in his Krishna avatar to his beloved shaka Arjuna. In the Vishwarupa, Vishnu is all radiant, illumined, with all the gods and goddesses shown as part of him, all forms of life emanating from him and all forms of life ending in him, all the worlds, time and space shown as a part of Him. The artist tries to convey a powerful idea in a small figure. The same idea is further extended with an image of Mahasadashiva and his consort in the same panel. Mahasadashiva has twenty five heads with fifty hands and is seated in Sukhasana while his consort has sixteen heads and thirty two hands. The concept of showing a god or goddess with multiple heads, limbs etc has definite purpose of conveying that it is impossible to entirely comprehend the Divine in our limited senses. The artist also tries to represent the impossible or the infinite in a finite form, which is incomprehensible in the ordinary way.



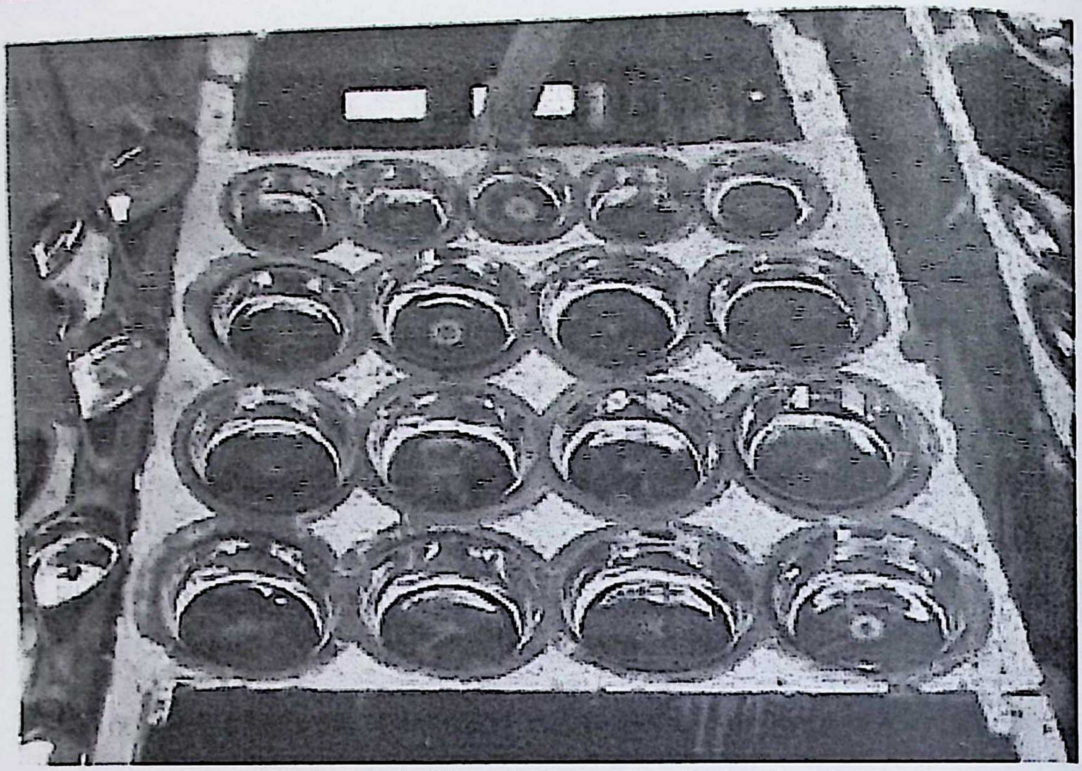
Kamachi amman (Parvati) seated on the kinni gini ratham blessing her devotees .

Kamachiamman(Parvati) on her (gini) kinni ratham fully decorated and illuminated on her way giving darsan to her devotees, Kamachiamman kovil, Puducherry.

The second is the **Kinni (gini) ratham** of Kamachiamman koil at Pondicherry. This ratham is like any other ratham made from wood except the Vimana, which is made up of hundreds of discs made from Kinni. The kinni also has different names in different states like 'kansaa' in eastern part of the country. It is made up of five metals silver, copper, zinc, sternum and tin. There is a special method of making these metals. One of the popular uses of this material is the classical ghanta or bell, utensils for puja, daily use utensils provided by the parents to their daughter during marriage to start their new kitchen, large bells for the temples etc. The ghanta is used during puja in the entire east, north east India as a musical instrument and it is held in one hand and struck with a small stick with the other hand. It is played during the arati at the temples. During the rathayatra it is played by several devotes together in rhythm. The bells which are hanging from the temple may be made from bronze or kansaa material. It is struck during the rituals of the temple and is very auspicious. A series of small tiny bells may be placed in the devarathams and they jingle during the pulling of the ratham. In the vimana of the Kamachiamman devaratham the kinni discs are placed from top to bottom. Smaller kinni are also placed with red triangular flags at the edges of the octagonal vimana. The frames are quadrangular is shape with circular gaps and covered by white cloths and the



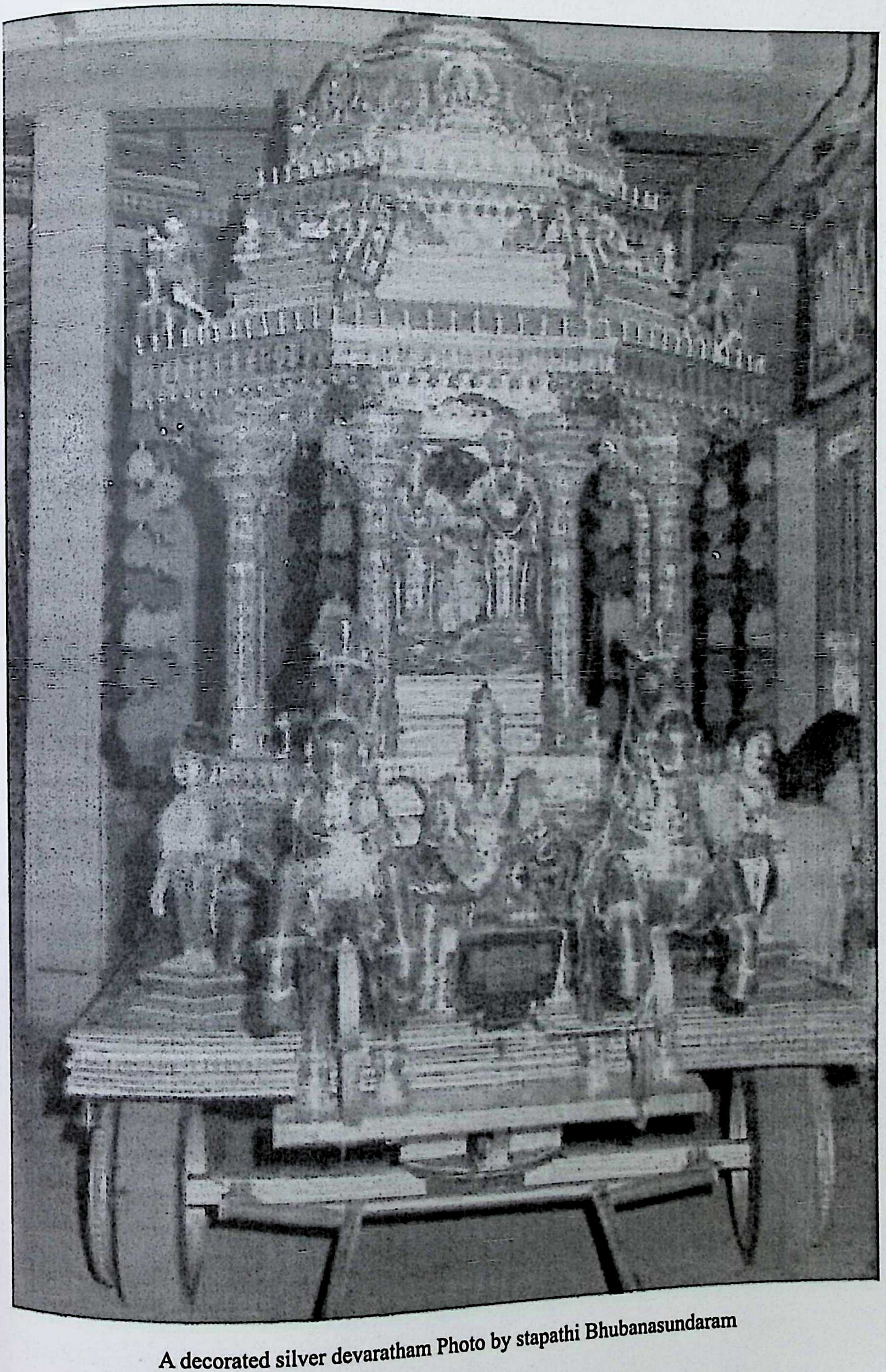
The decorated kalasa and the celestal umbrella atop the gini ratham.



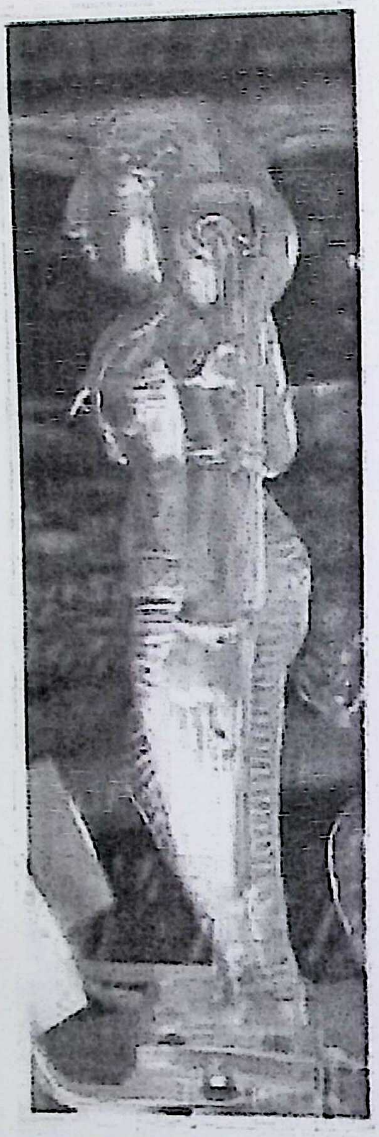
A close-up view of the kina (gini) plates attached to the vimana.

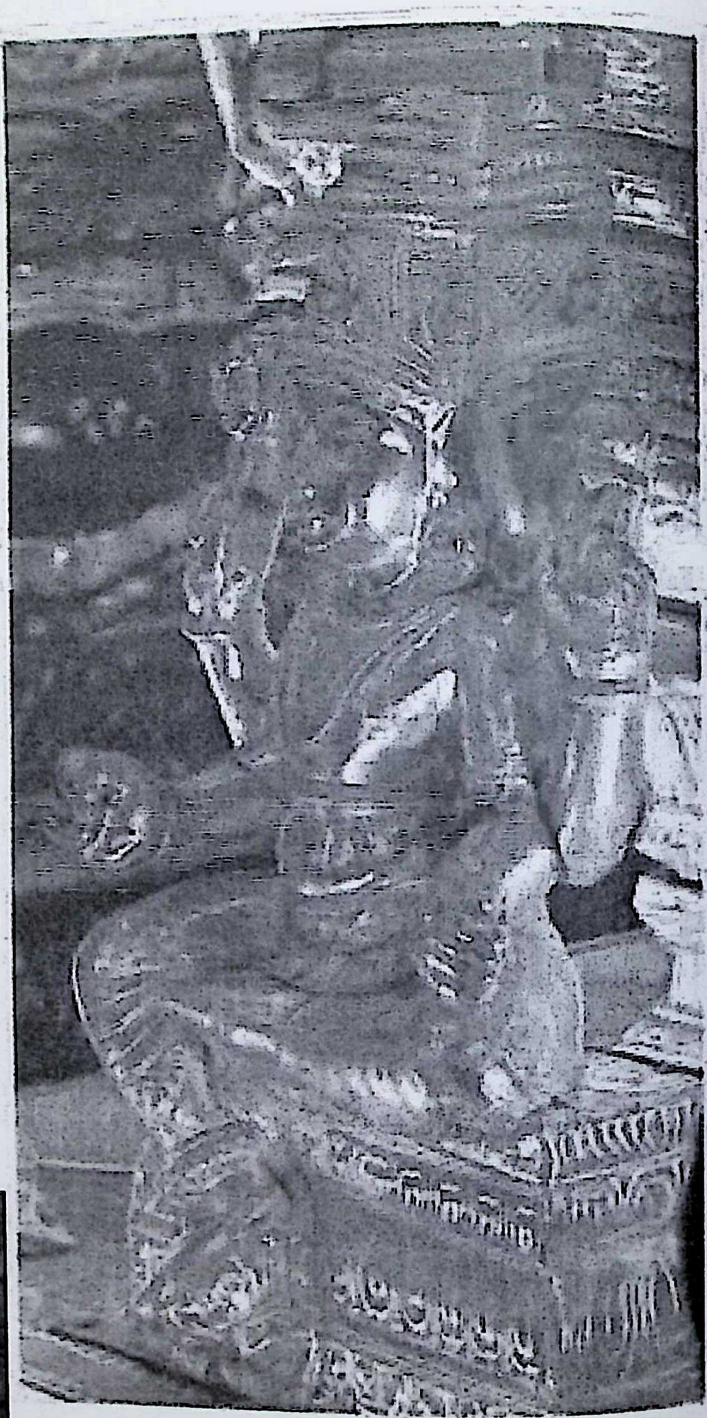
kinni discs fit into these spaces. Each disc is like a round dish and about a couple of inches in depth with a small hole at the centre to put a nail or a screw to fix it to an underlying frame of the vimana. Thus they are set up in such a way that it remains very stable and none of the discs have a chance to fall off during the movement of the ratham during the festival. The entire vimana is thus covered with kinni discs of small and big sizes. Another peculiarity of this kinni ratham is that Kamachiamman uthsava murti is installed on it only in the evening and extensive light arrangement is done to illuminate it from outside. Unlike most of the devarathams which are drawn during the day, this kinni ratham is drawn only in the night, the rathayatra starting about 9pm and finishing by early morning.

The golden and the silver rathams are special in their own right. The rathams were normally made up from wood for centuries together. As the resources of the temples started increasing the larger temples started adding rathams made from silver and gold. In the present era of the twenty-first century there are more than a dozen golden rathams in south India. The silver ratham is called as Velliteir and the golden ratham as the Thanga-teir. In both the rathams the main structure is made from wood and a thin plate of alloy metal is used to cover

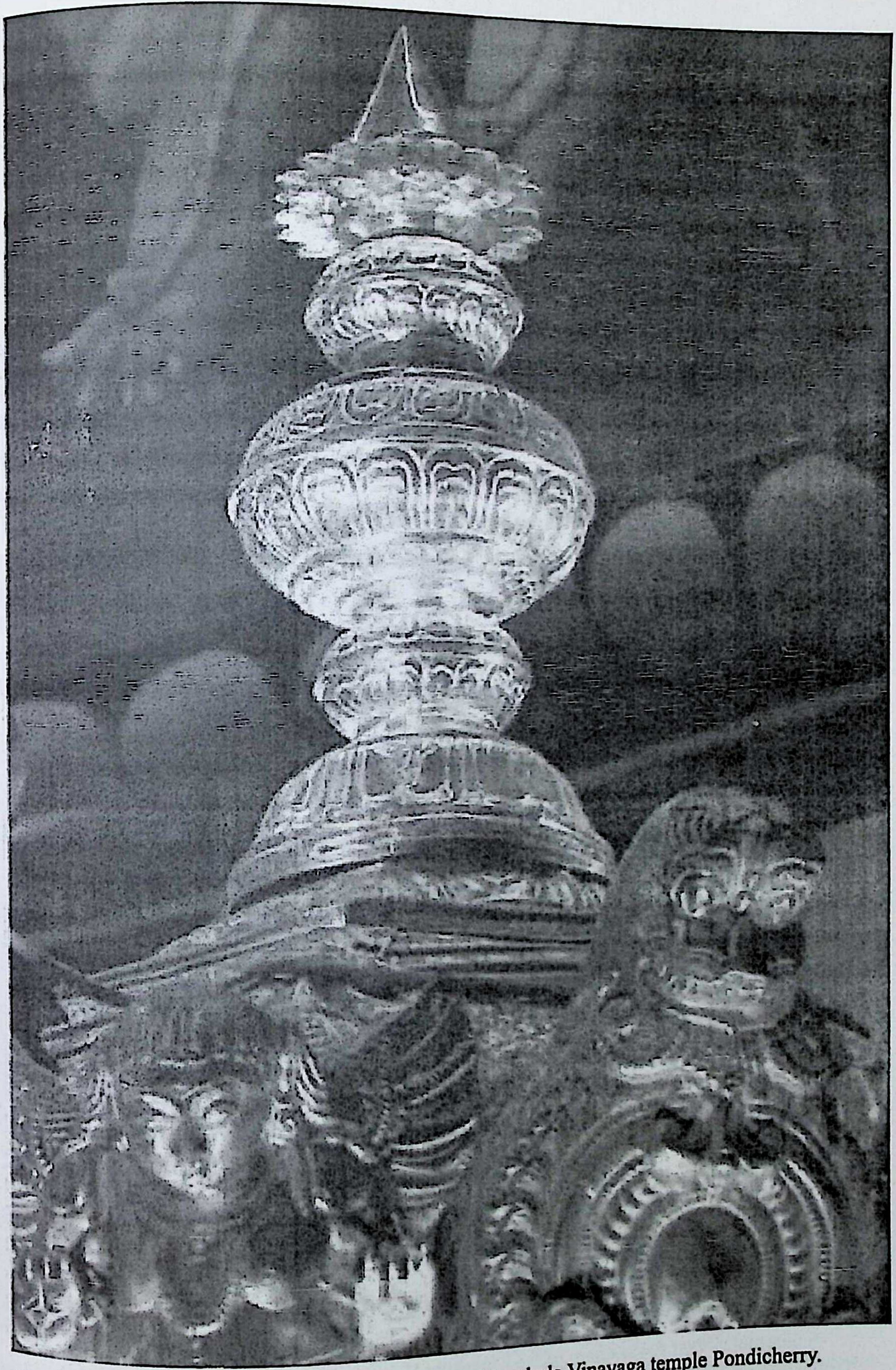


A decorated silver devaratham Photo by stapathi Bhubanasundaram

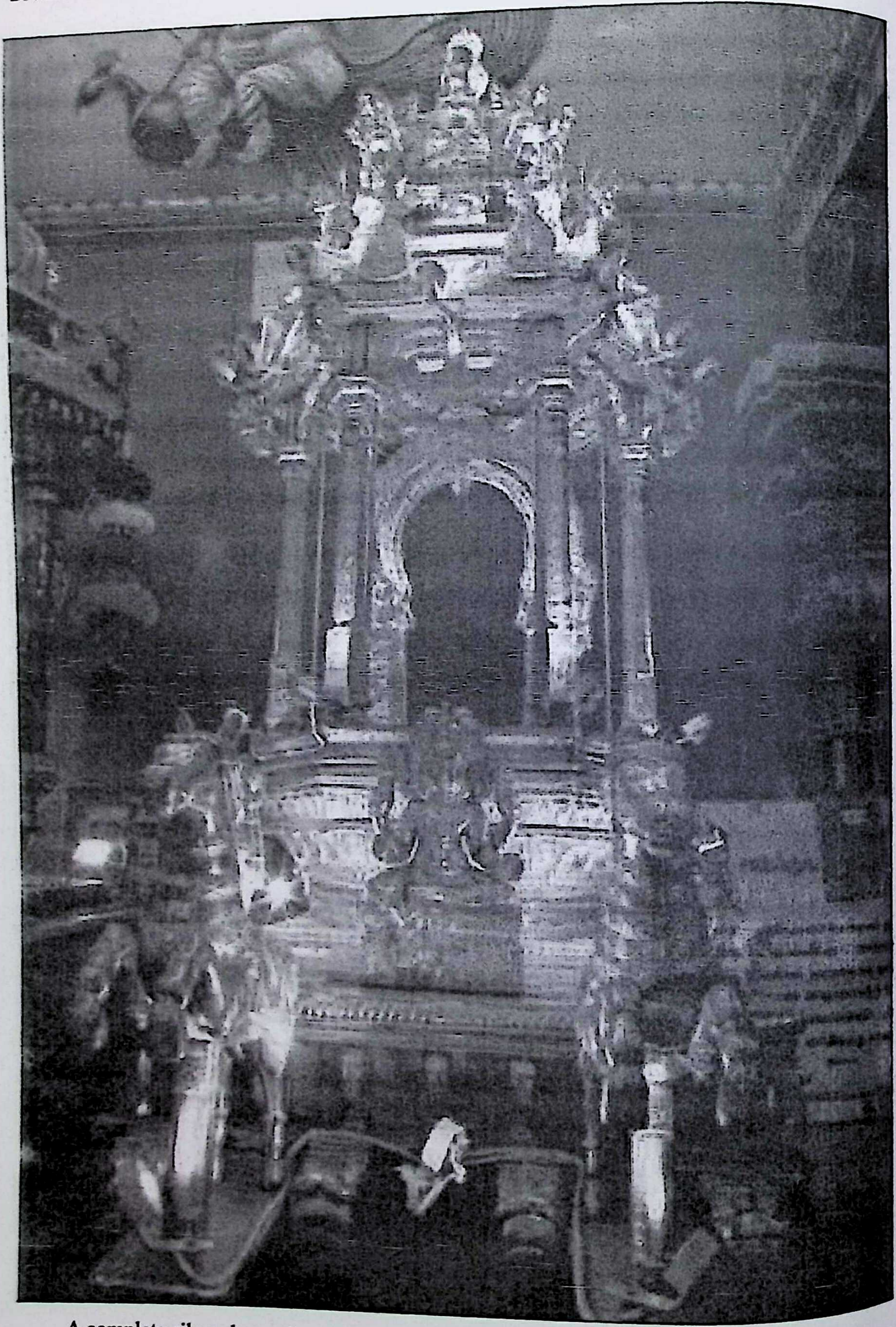




The sliver ratham of Manakula Vinayag temple, Pondicherry. On the top left is the chouli bearer and the serene face of the horse on the lift side. Above is a sarathi of the ratham, Lord Brahma seated holding symbolically the reins of the ratham.

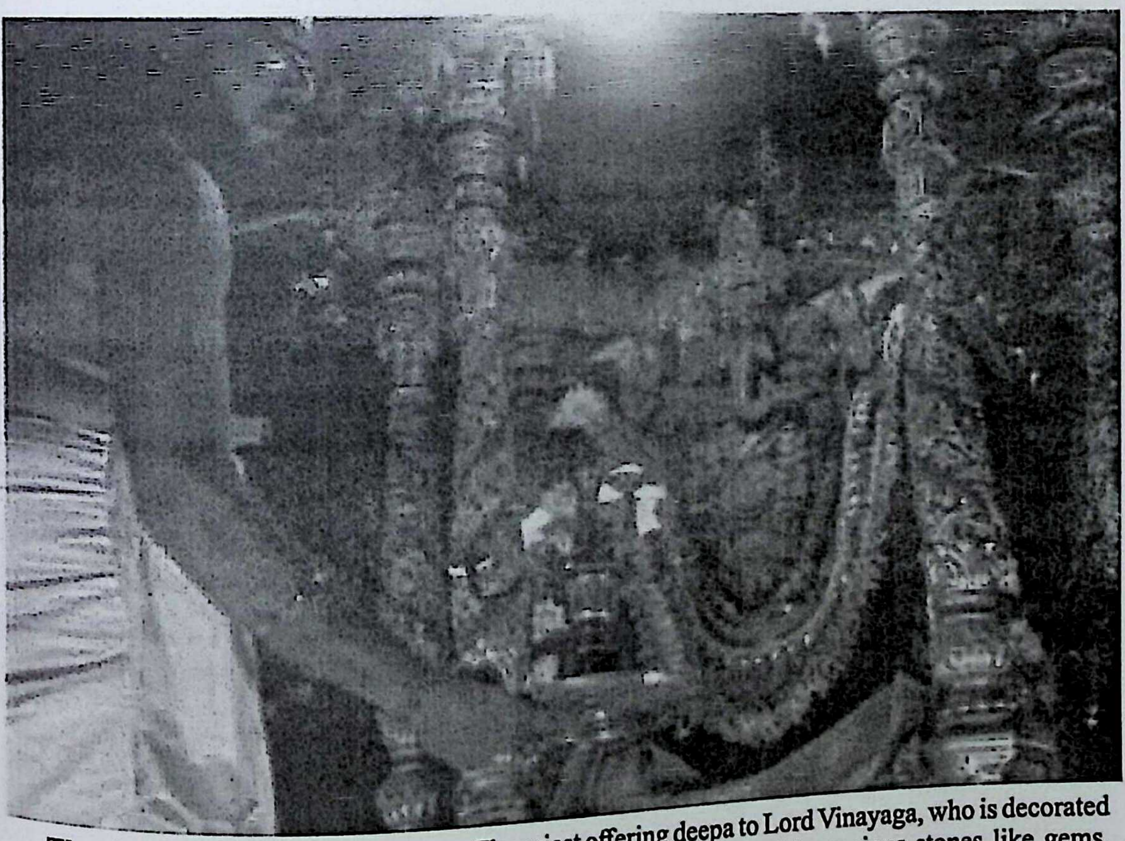


The Kalasa atop the vimana of the silver ratham at Manakula Vinayaga temple Pondicherry.



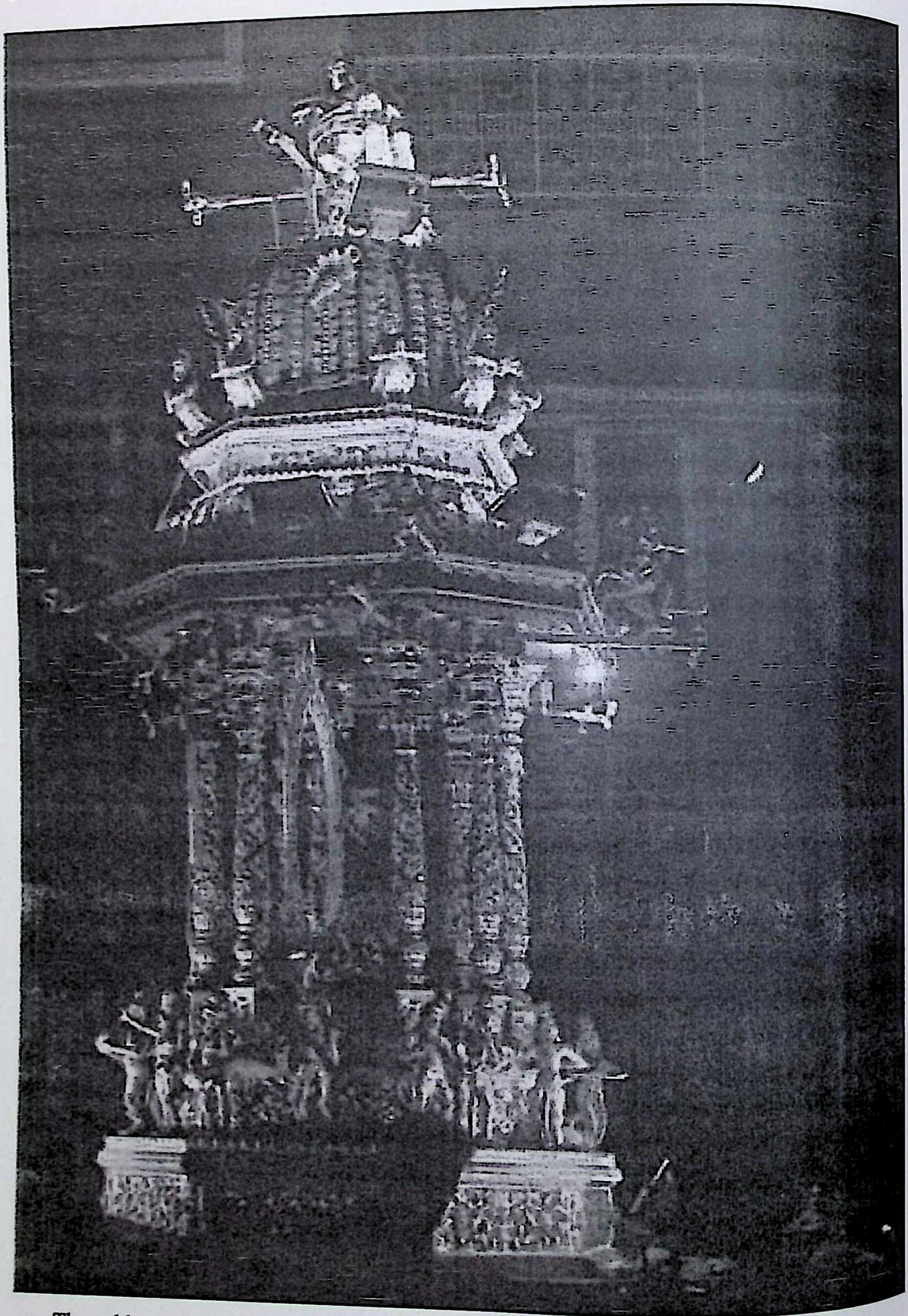
A complete silver devaratham of the Manakula Vinayaga temple at Pondicherry, with horses, sarathi, chouli bearers, pedestal for the utshava murti and decorated vimana.

the entire ratham. This alloy may be coated with silver or gold by electroplating. Sometimes pure silver or gold is used as the plate. Many a time gold coating is provided on the Bronze metal plates which are used for the ratham. In all of them the artist engraves the designs, deities, animals etc which has been already depicted on the wooden panels and other parts of the ratham. The entire ratham is covered and no wooden frame is seen from outside. The smaller components are made from silver or gold and placed directly on the ratham. The chouli bearer, sarathi, horses etc are made separately and installed on the ratham. These rathams are usually very small of about 10 to 12 feet in height along with the vimana. Unlike the bigger rathams where the vimana is dismantled and reassembled for the festival, the golden and silver rathams are kept as a whole. They are just cleaned and the surface is polished before the rathayatra. These rathams are very simple without elaborate tiers and panels. A few centuries back golden colored rathams were made using vegetable dyes on the wooden surface of the ratham. A ratham believed to be over two hundred years old was recently found

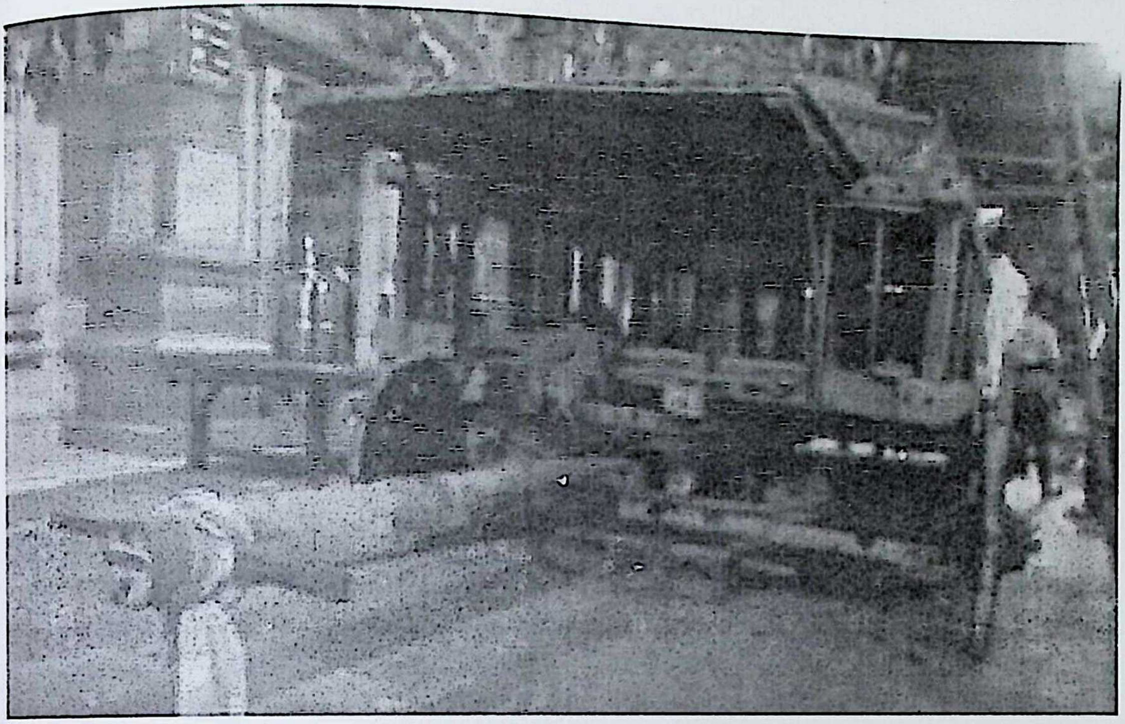


The vimana of the golden ratham: The priest offering deepa to Lord Vinayaga, who is decorated with golden ornaments and wearing a ratna mukuta or a crown with precious stones like gems, emerald, diamond etc.

Amid the tread of many infinities,

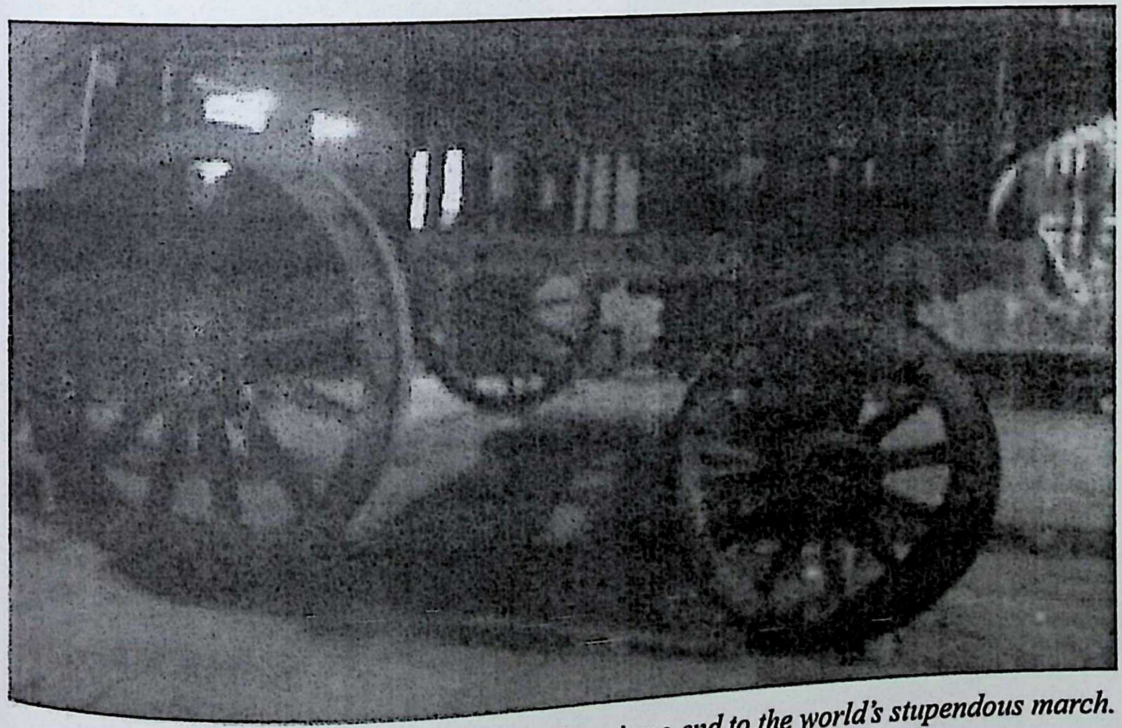


The golden ratham recently found , belived to be at least three to four hundred years old, now kept at the Manakula vinayaga temple, taken out once in a year for the rathauthava, has very beautiful figures all around it.



The design of the very old devaratham presently at the Manakula Vinayaga temple, placed on a improvised cart It has small front wheels and larger back wheels, there is a inovative design at the centre of the front axle for changing the direction of the ratham during the rathautshava. The system is sandwitched between the bars placed above the axle of the back wheels and extending just on to the top edge of the front wheels There are vertical logs all around above them to support the platform above.

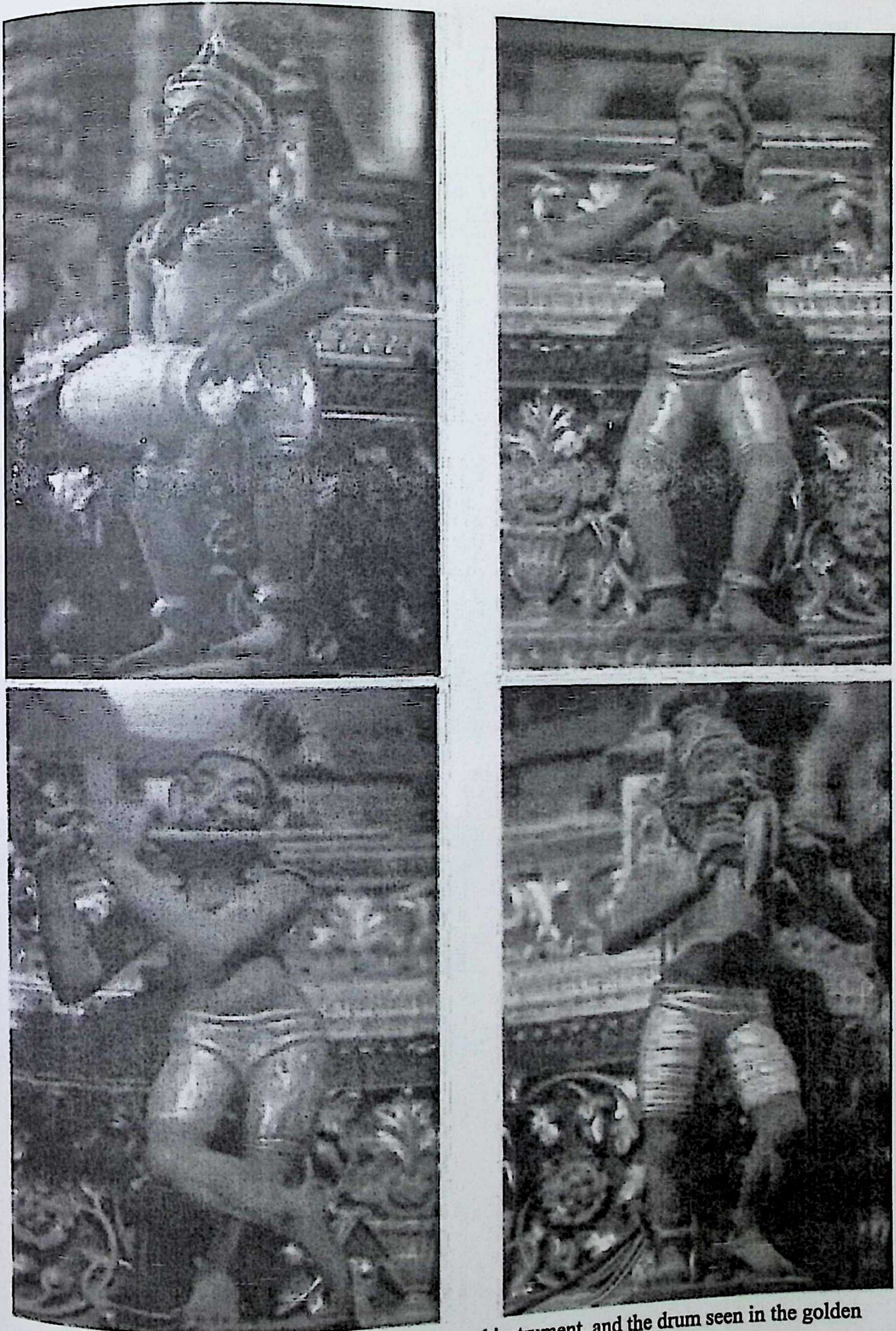
Through all the slow mysterious march goes on:



There is no end to the world's stupendous march.

in Pondicherry along with some gold coins, and is now kept in the Manakula Vinayaga koil premises. The entire ratham is placed on an old cart with a unique system to maneuver it easily at the corners of the road when taken out in procession. It is taken out for procession only once in a year. It is made up of wood with the polished surface colored golden with vegetable dye and very well preserved. It is a medium sized ratham with quite a number of decorations. In the upper part of the vimana there is a row of rishes in anjali hasta. Many figures are also seen in zoomorphic form with the upper part of the body being that of a human and the lower part that of an animal. Many of them have a full beard. In the lower part of the vimana we have figures of many devotes playing musical instruments like the bansuri or the bamboo flute, cymbals, kahali a piped instrument, dholak or mridangam etc.

Some of the devotees are seen to be performing intense austerities. A beautiful golden Garuda is also seen standing in dancing posture with a deep red beak and two hands in abhaya and varada mudra. The silver ratham are similarly to the golden rathams. They are usually older than the golden rathams. Silver vahanas are more popular as they are much smaller and quicker to make and costs much less. Most of the temples in south India have at least one silver vahana. Both the golden and silver vahana are taken out for the rathayatra like the other rathams. Same rituals are performed. The only difference is the size, the golden and silver rathams are much smaller and lighter in weight and can be taken out easily in the car street, pradashkina around the temple can be completed as turning around the corners is quick and smooth. They are usually decorated and illuminated and the procession is taken out in the night.



Devotees playing the venu , the cymbals, piped instrument, and the drum seen in the golden ratham(old) at the Manakula Vinayaga temple, Puducherry .

And shadowless bliss for suffering human hearts

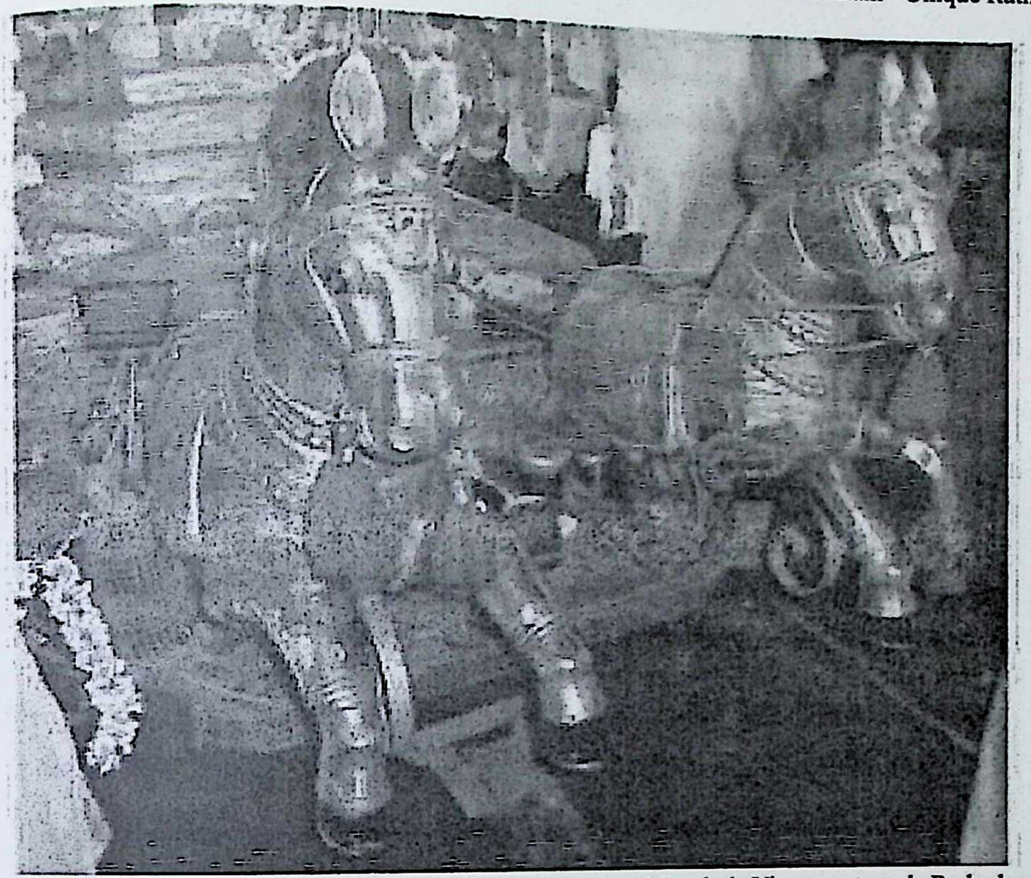
Rishis

But finds Bright hints, not the embodied truth:

Devotee

Patanjali

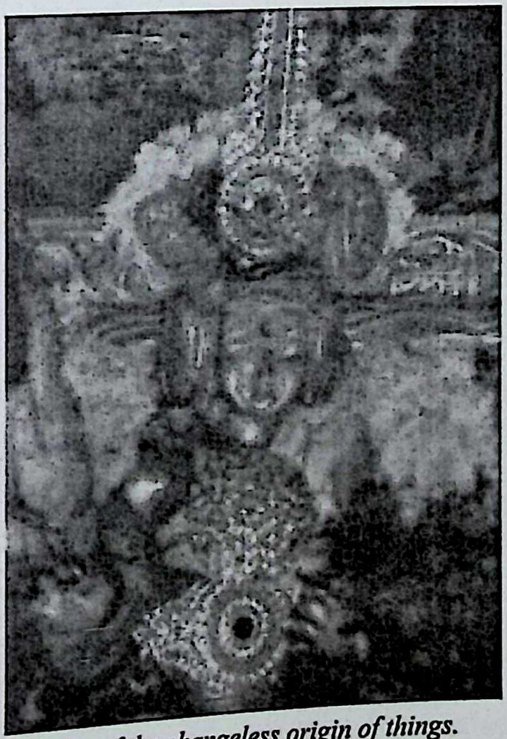
Suka (Garuda)



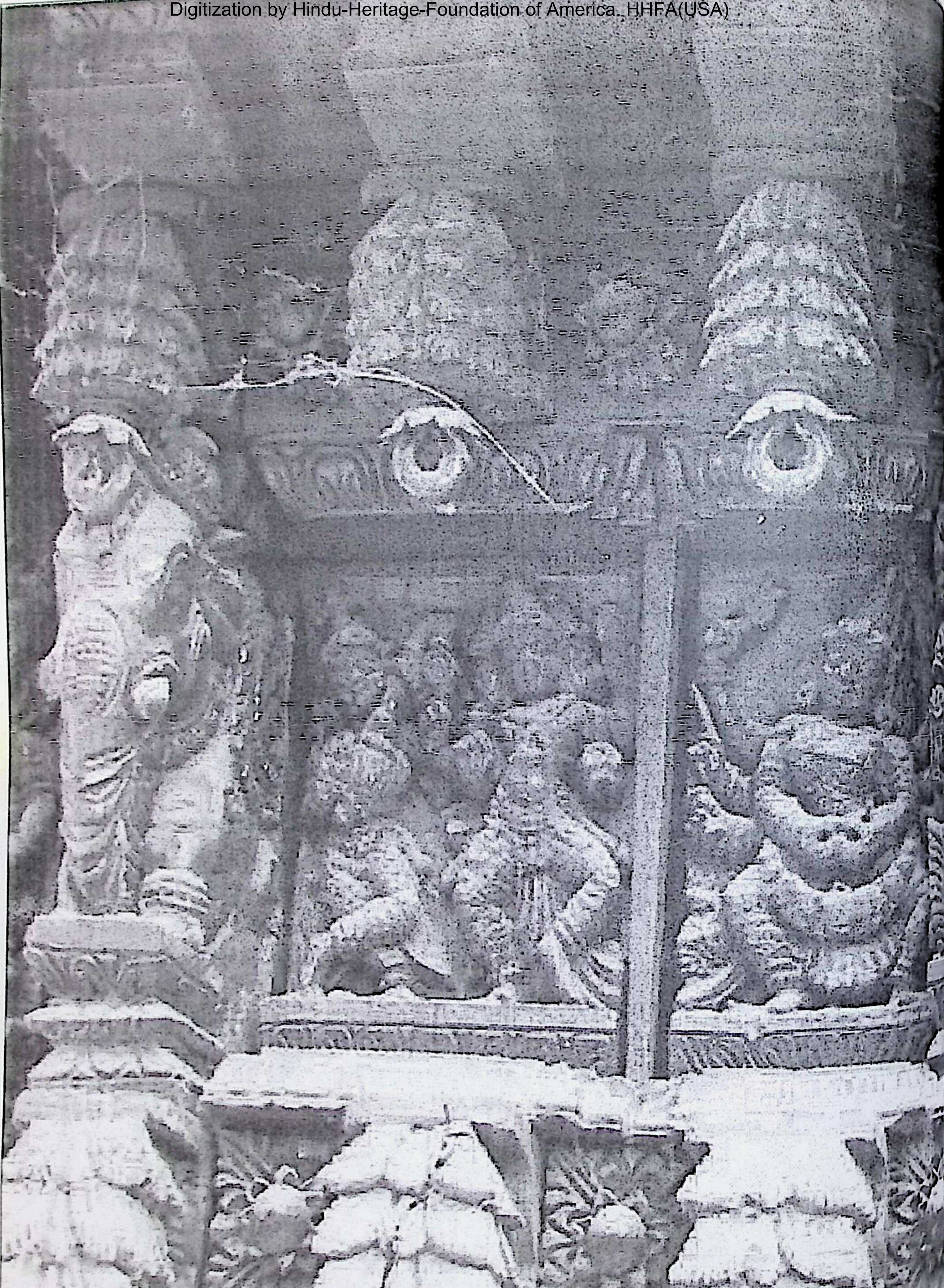
The golden horses in galloping posture of the ratham(new) at Manakula Vinayaga temple Puducherry, below is Lord Brahma as the sarathi and the golden chouli bearer, the lady has a beautiful head gear.

The strange significant icon of a Power

Came burdened with a beauty moved and strange



Out of the changeless origin of things.



The Urdhva tandava panel :Shiva in urdhva tandava at the centre and Amman as Kali next to Shiva with ei hands Nandi on the right playing the mridangam, Mahasadashiva on the right in chatura tandava posture, Brahm the left of Kali in dancing posture and Saraswati playing the Veena

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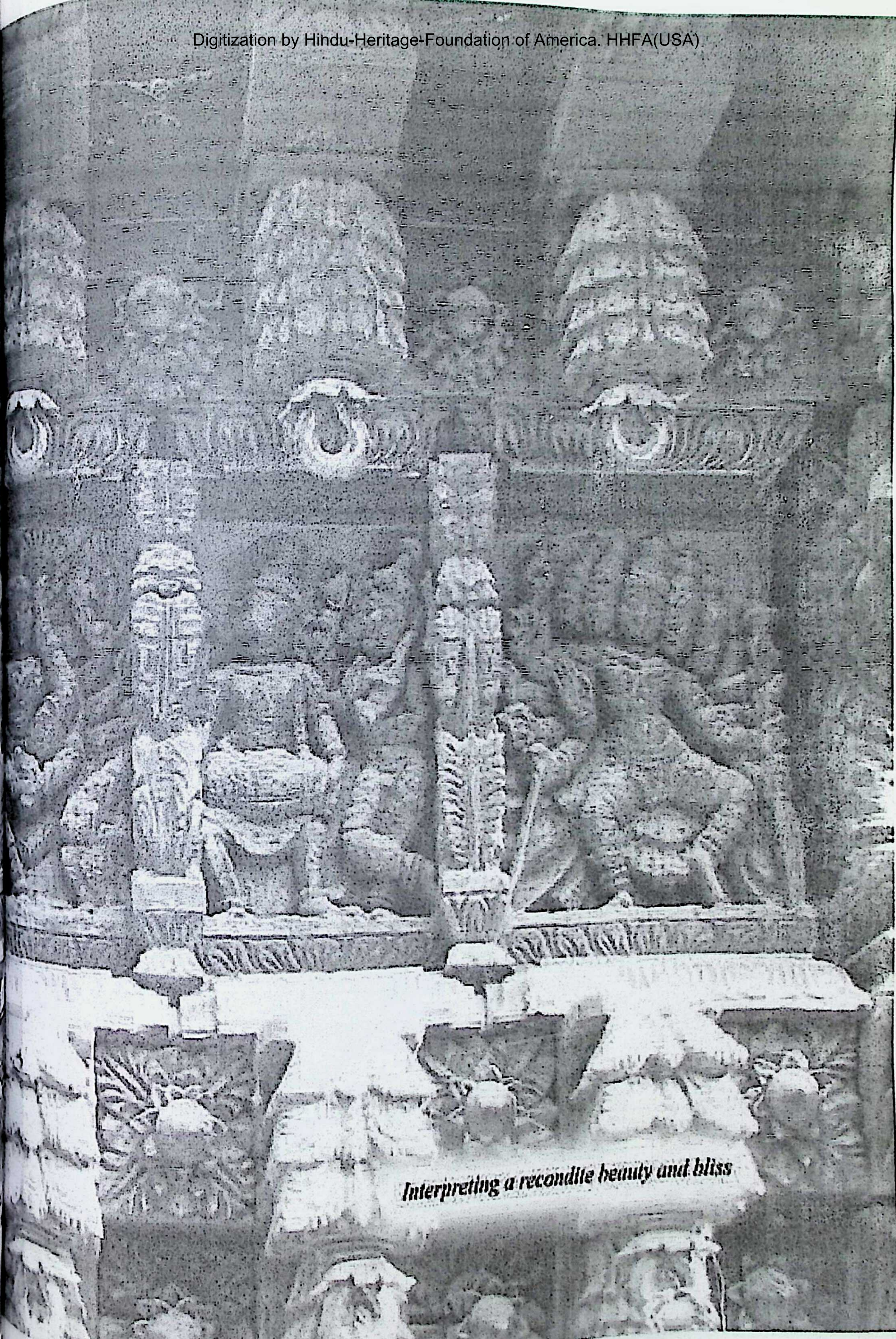


Interpreting a recondite beauty and bliss

Chapter - VII

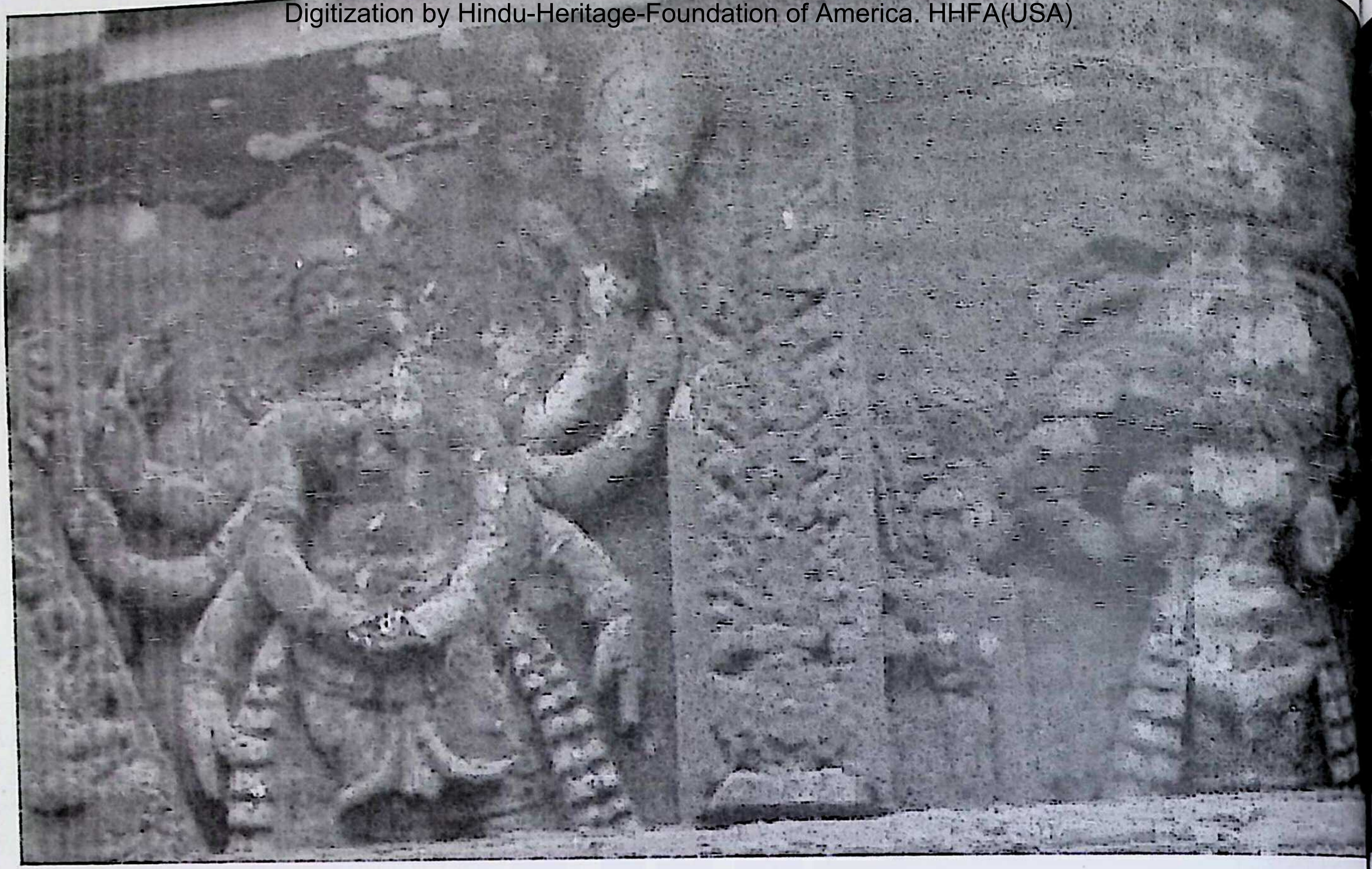
Dancing figures from the temple cars of South India

It is known that all the classical Indian dance forms have evolved from „Natyashastra". The treatise of Natyashastra is supposed to have been written by sage Bharata muni. There are lot of evidences in the form of postures and inscriptions in the temple all over the Indian subcontinent describing the Natyashastra. The present study is to find out the dancing figures seen in the devarathams of South India. The devarathams form a big repertoire of images telling stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, Vedas, Upanishads and other scriptures. There are presently more than one thousand devarathams in Tamilnadu, Puducherry, Karnataka and Andrapradesh. As it is not possible to cover all of them here, only a representative sample is taken for the study to include rathams from Puducherry, Thiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Nagapattinam, Avinashi and Milam. The present study has been broadly classified into the dancing figure relating to Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti and others.

Shiva Nataraja – The Cosmic Dancer

Shiva as Nataraja is the cosmic dancer. He is the master and source of all the dance forms. He is also the source of all art forms – dance, music, drama, etc. Shiva as Nataraja taught all the art forms to Bharata Muni- the rishi from Bharata Desha (the land of Bharata). Bharat muni is considered to be a rishi of the Vedic era. Some consider that Bharatamuni refers to a number of rishis of the Vedic time. It is said that Lord Shiva instructed Bharata muni to write the Natyashastra .The Natyashastra is considered as the fifth Veda after the Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Atharva Veda and Yajurveda. Natyashastra literary means natya and shastra, Natya includes all art forms including dance, drama, music etc, shastra means the knowledge or codification and rules and regulations to be followed for the performance of Natya.

Most of the Shiva Temples in south India have a separate shrine for Nataraja inside their temple premises. A separate hall called Nata mandapam is present next to the Nataraja shrine for the dance presentations. The temple of Chidambaram has Lord Nataraja as the principal deity instead of the usual Shiva Lingam.

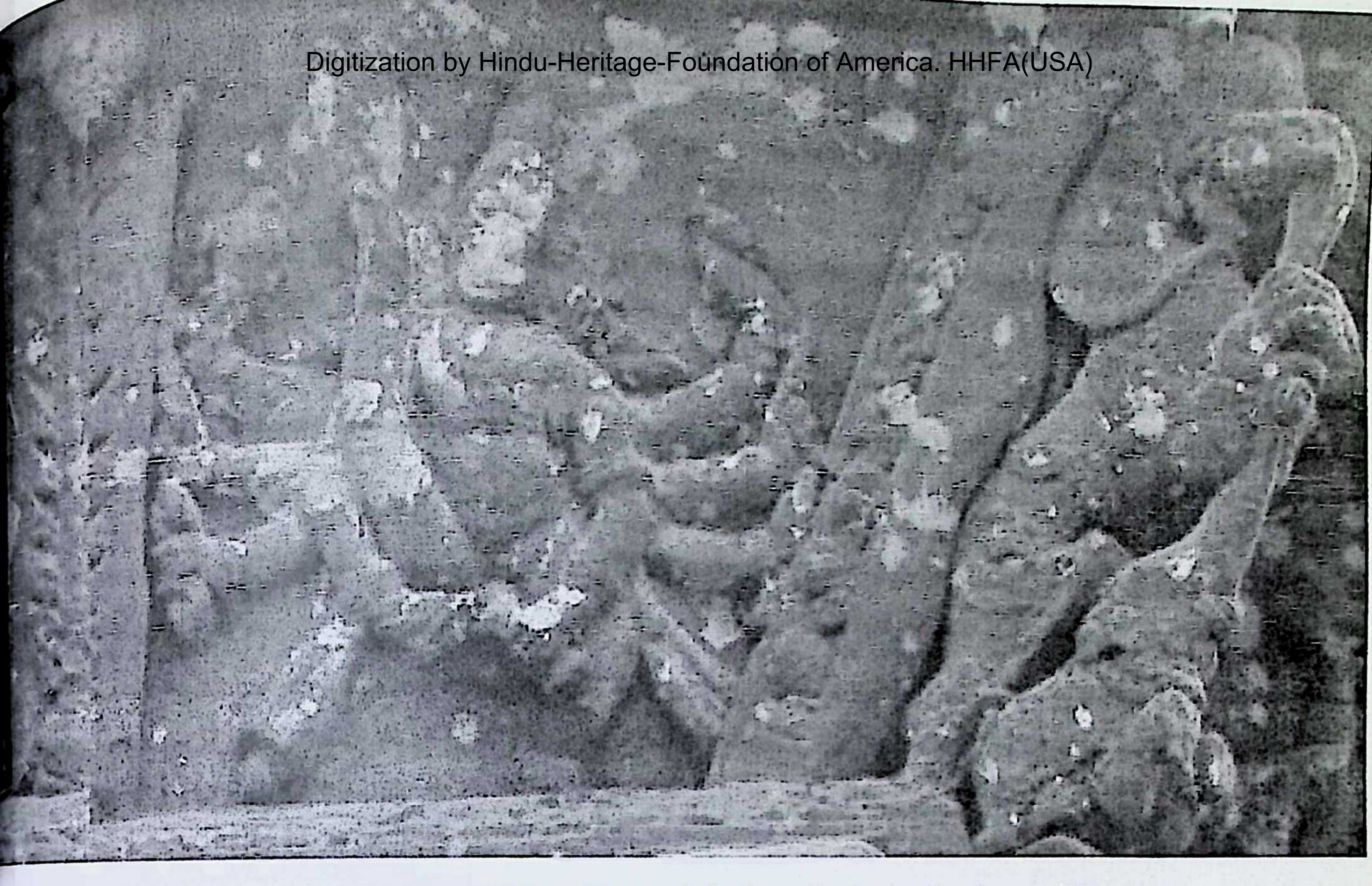


The urdhvatandava panel from the Rameswaram devaratham showing Lord Shiva in urdhva tandava with right leg raised up and playing the damaru in between his legs and he is ashtabhooja (eight hands) with Devi Parvati is shown in the left with eight hands and lord Brahma is at the centre acting as a judge and also observe the beautiful yali at the corners of the panel.

Shiva in Urdhava tandava.

Amman as Kali

A cry of splendour from a mouth of storm,



The word, the form, the charm, the glory and grace

Bhrama playing the gini and keeping the tempo urdhava tandava panel at Khumokonam, Tamilnadu.

The primal Energy took him in its arms;

Amman (Parvati) in dance posture from the Shiva temple in the M G road, Pondicherry

She comes to our hearts and bodies and our lives

Lord Shiva is considered to have started all the one hundred and eight tandavas. These are presented as one hundred and eight Karanas. These are present in some of thetemples including the Brihadeswara Shiva temple of Thanjore and the gopuram of Nataraja temple of Chidambaram and Shiva temple at Thirupatighai near Panruti of Caddalore district of Tamilnadu. In the temple cars the most common and most popular presentations are the Ananda Tandava, Rudra Tandava, Urdhava Tandava and Chatura Tandava.

Ananda tandava is the dance of Bliss by Nataraja and forms the most common Tandava. Lord Shiva in this form is four handed. The right hand in front is in Abhaya mudra while the backhand holds the damaru. The left hand in front is usually in Gaja hasta and the back hand holding the Agni. The left leg is raised in kunchita pose and the right leg is firmly placed on the demon Apasmara. Lord Shiva has a quiet smiling but serene face. Behind Shiva one may see many flying Vidyadharas. In some panels one can see Goddess Parvati as Shivagami Sundari next to Lord Shiva. In the dance of Bliss – Shiva is self contained. He is the source of all creation, vibration and movement. The damaru represents this source. The right hand in Abhaya mudra, presents blessings by the Lord, hence the protection provided by him for the sustenance and maintenance of life. The back hand holding Agni or fire which is symbolic of the power to destroy all that is of old order so that the new can be born and created. The right leg is firmly placed on Apasmara – which shows the lord having full control over the ego and all the sense organs. The raised leg is the final path for salvation or Moksha. The lord delivers his devotees from maya and ego to realise the truth and unite with the „Divine. "

The Urdhava tandava

Urdhava tandava murti of Shiva is very popular in the temple cars. It is usually presented in a panel of images which include other gods and goddess. The story behind the panel presentation is that long time ago; there was a great debate among the devotees of Lord Shiva and Parvati as to who was a greater dancer. Hence to resolve the issue a great competition was held between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Other gods are seen to accompany this great event. Nandi is seen playing the mridangam, Vishnu playing the cymbal, Saraswati playing the Veena, Ganapati playing the Tanpura and Brahma either playing a stringed instrument or sitting as a judge. In the same panel Parvati is seen as Kali, in a fierce dancing posture. It is said that she could excel Lord Shiva in all the Tandavas. In the end Shiva does Urdhava tandava. Urdha literally means raised up, in this tandava Shiva is seen to raise his right leg vertically up with the foot of the leg facing the sky. This image of Shiva is called Urdha tandava murti. He plays the damaru with two hands in front. In some panel the left leg is shown raised up. In one rare panel there are two images of Lord Shiva one with right leg raised and another with left leg raised placed side by side. Lord Shiva is seen with four arms but sometimes with eight arms. Two hands play the damaru and other two hands are in Suchimudra.

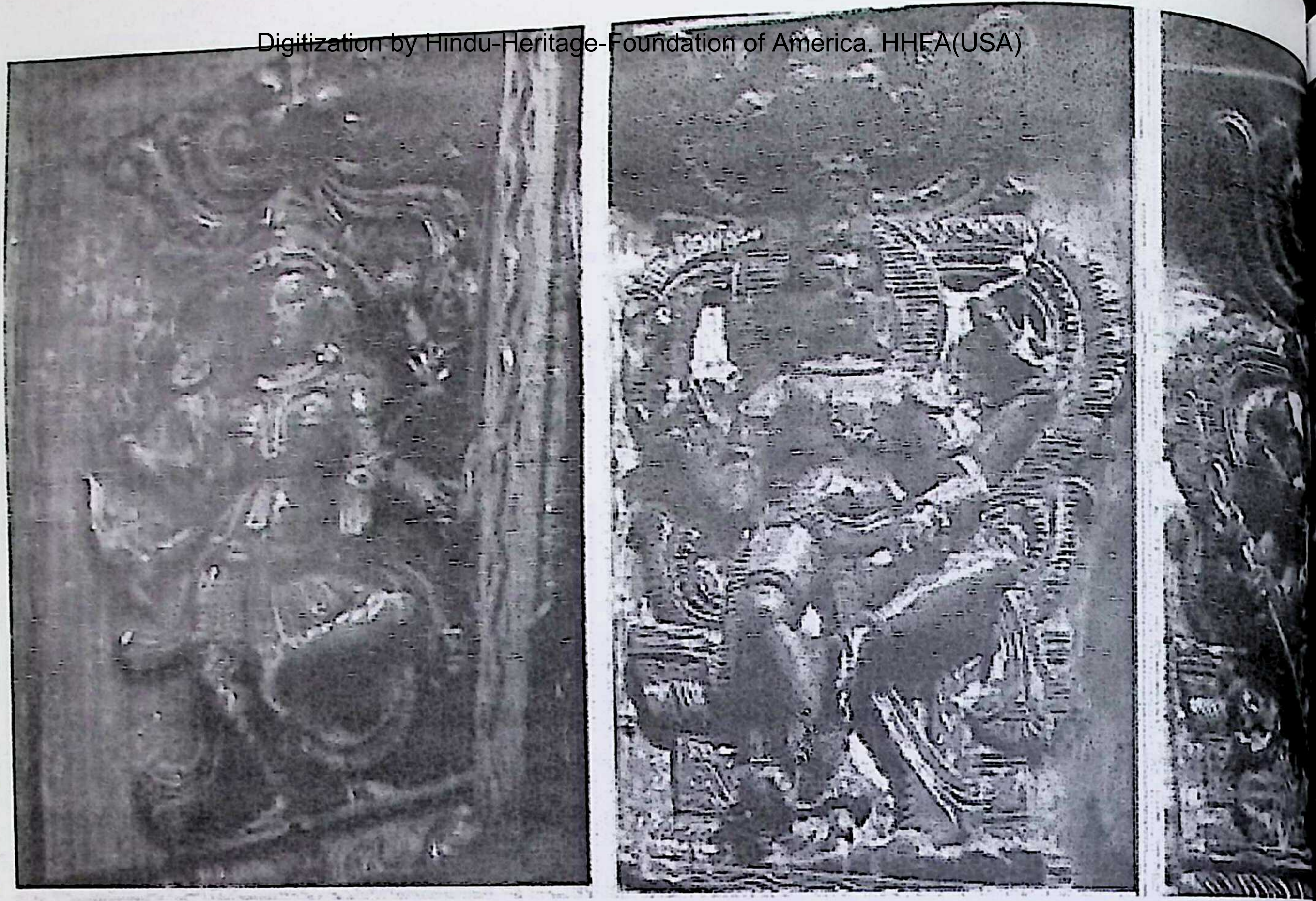
Kali is seen with eight or ten hands holding many arms in the same panel in a dancing posture. In some she is seen accepting her Lords supremacy as she is not willing to raise her legs in the presence of men. In some she is seen below the image of Lord Shiva with folded hands, in some panels Parvati is seen to be angry or dismayed and feels that Lord Shiva has tricked her, as he is aware that she would not attempt such a movement in front of men.

It is also an indication that women in general should not attempt such extreme movements during dance presentation while men are allowed to do so. In fact this type of tandava forms a main dance for the Mayurbhanj Chau, a part of Manipuri dance and part of some of the traditional martial art dances from other states like Orissa, Kerala and Tamilnadu.

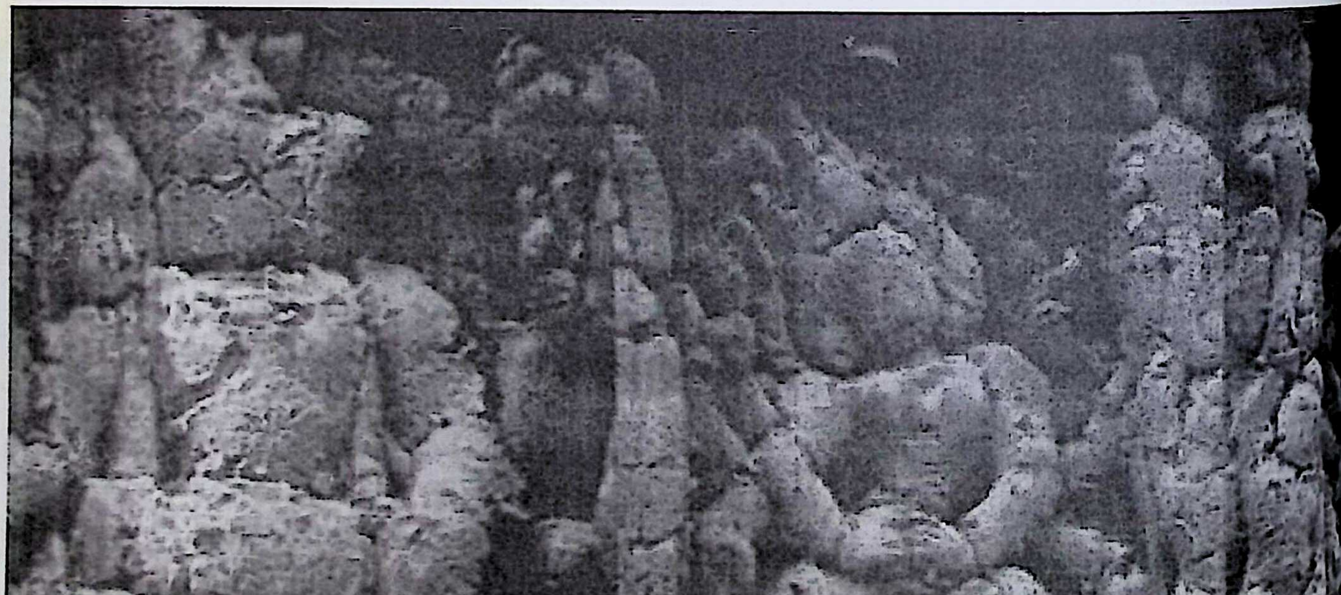
Brahma, Vishnu, Nandi and others in Urdha tandava panel

Nandi is the vahana of Shiva- Parvati is seen in the Urdha tandava panel playing the mridangam – a drum. He is seen in zoomorphic form of having a human body with a bull "s face, one hand ready to strike the mridangam. He is also called as Nandi keswara – Nandi with the power of Eswara (Lord Shiva). He is the author of the treatise Abinayadarpana which describes in great details the shastra of Abhinaya. Even till date this is faithfully followed by all the classical Indian dances for performing Abinayas.

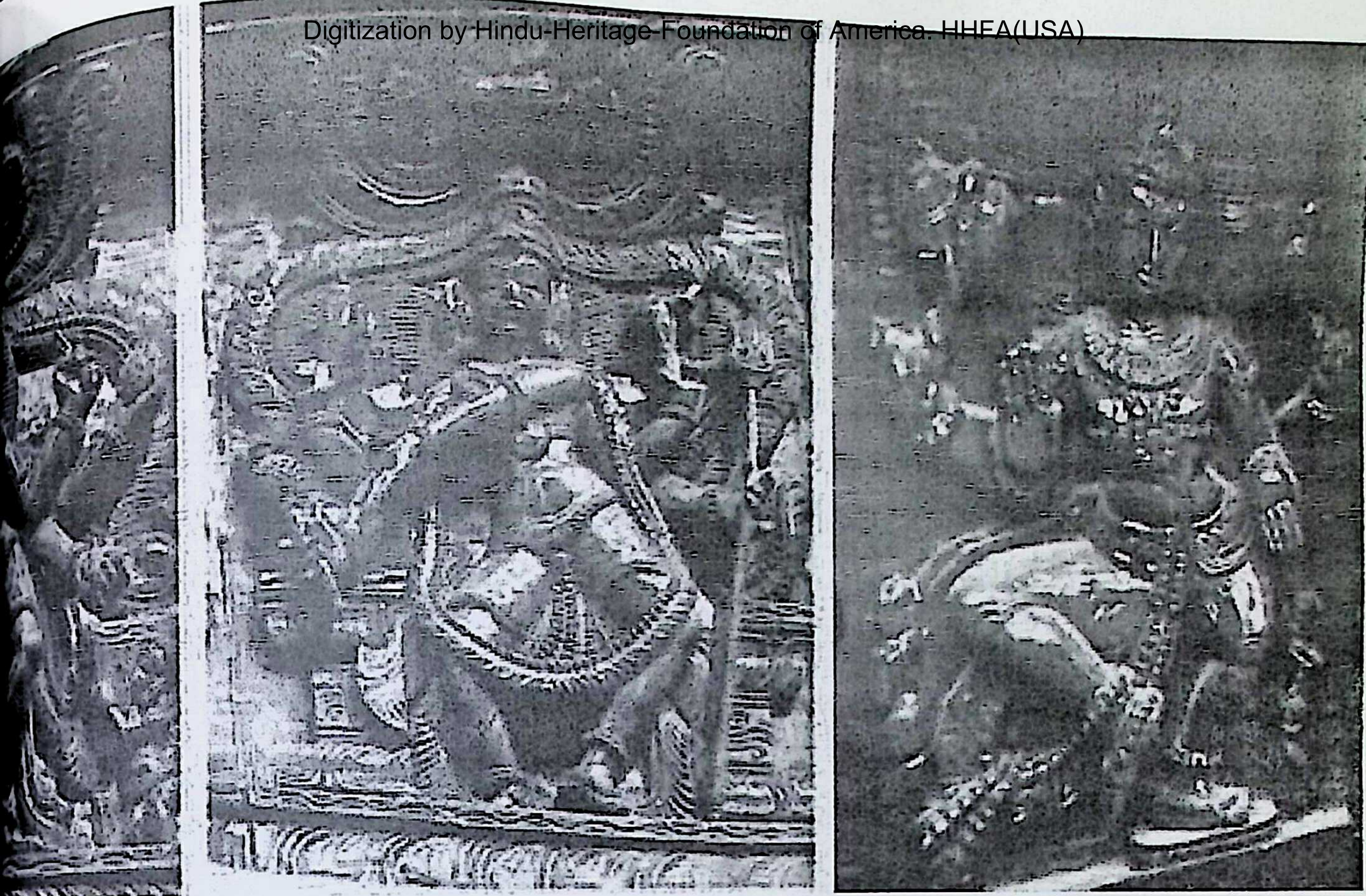
Lord Brahma is seen sometimes with three faces (the back one hidden) either playing some musical instrument or seated on the lotus flower as a judge. Most of them have Goddess Saraswati seated next to him seated on a lotus playing the Veena. Lord Vishnu is seen to be playing the Cymbal or flute and he is supposed to maintain the tala (rhythm) of the dance duel. Ganapati is seen sometimes playing some musical instrument in the same panel.



Shiva Tandava panel from the devaratham at Avinashi near Coimbatore in Tamilnadu : On the extreme left is Parvati (Amman) in Tandava, Shiva is in chatura tandava and posture exactly similar to Parvati, then Shiva is in Urdhvatandava with the right leg raised up.

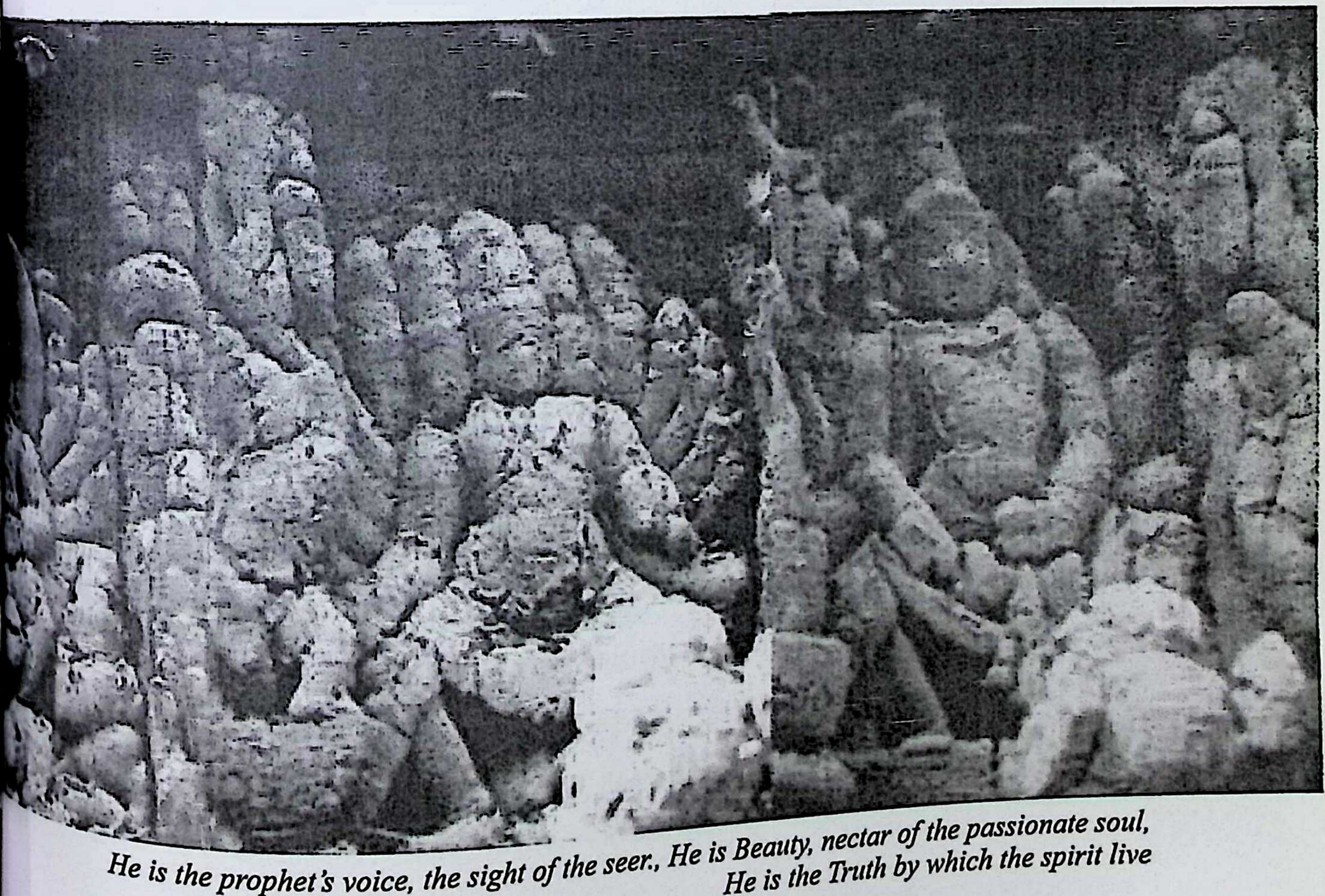


The Urdhva tandava panel from the Shiva temple Villianur, Pondicherry.Left to right: Nandi playing the mridangam, Parvati (amman) as Kali dancing , Shiva in Udhava tandava with right leg raised, Mahasadashiva in chatura tandava murti, Shiva in ananda tandava .



Above Shiva is in Ananda tandava without the apasmara asura below, the extreme right Shiva is in tandava with the right leg bend at the knee, here again the demon apasmara is absent.

He is infinity in a little space, He is immortality in the arms of death.



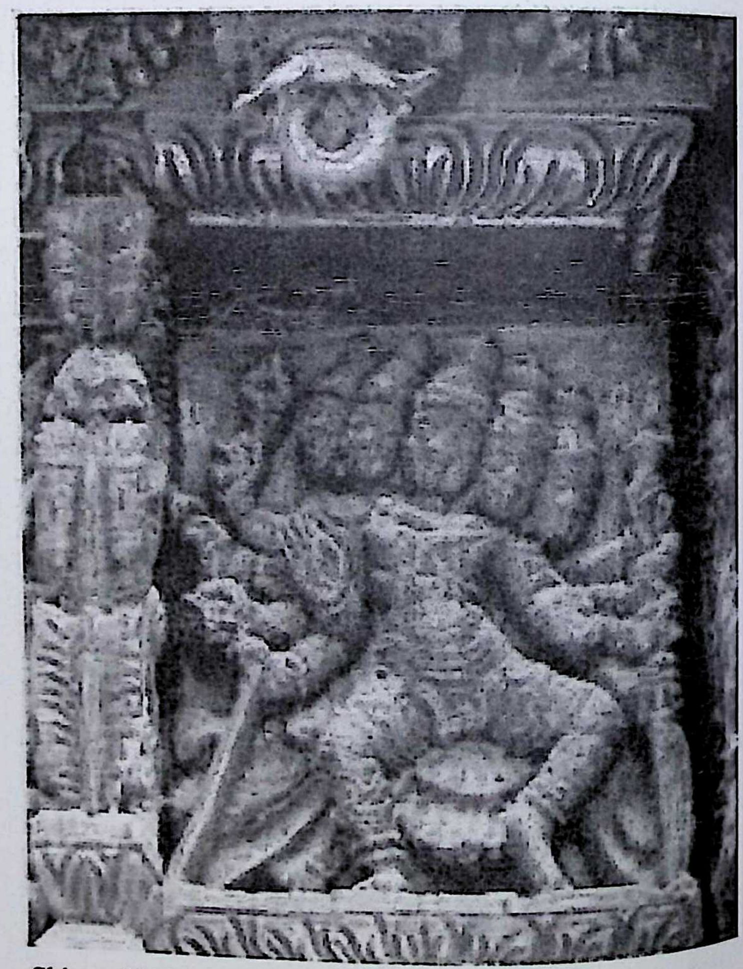
He is the prophet's voice, the sight of the seer., He is Beauty, nectar of the passionate soul,
He is the Truth by which the spirit live

Ardhanariswara

It is said that the genesis of Ardhanariswara form of Lord Shiva and Parvati is a form of the Urdhava-tandava-murthi. At the end of the fierce dance duel between Lord Shiva and Parvati, they merge together to form the "Ardhanariswara". In this form the right half is that of Shiva and the Left half is that of Parvati. It declares that both are not separate but One. Shiva and Parvati do not exist separately but as one consciousness. Shiva is the Purusha and Parvati is prakriti. While Shiva is the source, Parvati as Shakti is the force for all action. Hence both Shiva and Parvati is needed to present all action, movement, vibration etc.

Chatura Tandava

There is an exclusive panel of Shiva tandava in the temple car of Villianur Shiva temple at Puducherry. In this panel Shiva is showing not only his Ananda tandava and Urdha tandava but also his Chatura tandava. Shiva is seen as Sadashiva with five heads and ten arms in a classic chukka posture in Chatura tandava murthi. He is seen as eight handed Shiva in Urdha tandava murthi in the centre of the panel and four handed Ananda tandava murthi. Nandi is seen to play the mridangam, Saraswati is playing the Veena, and Vishnu is playing the gini (tiny cymbals).



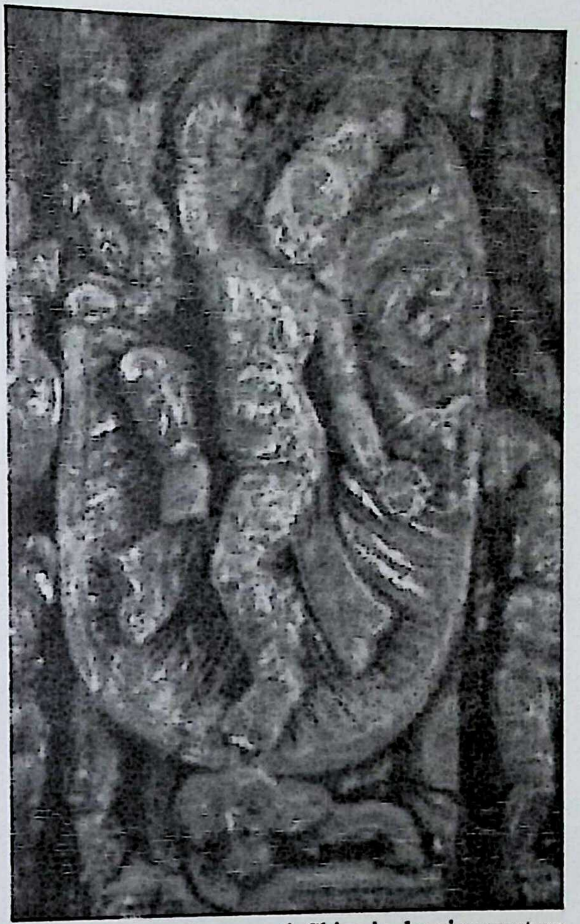
Shiva with five heads and in dancing posture

He is the riches of the spiritual Vast

Shiva in other dance forms:

Gajasura Samhara Murti

In this image Lord Shiva is seen to dance on the head of the elephant headed demon called Gajasura. He is supposed to have cut open the body of the elephant demon and is dancing on his head. He is with eight arms, of which four arms are holding open the elephant stomach, one is hand holding the damaru, another is holding Agni and his torso is in extreme tribhanga posture with one leg bent at the hip and other bent at the knee while the foot is firmly placed on the head of the asura. Goddess Parvati is seen on the side holding a child.



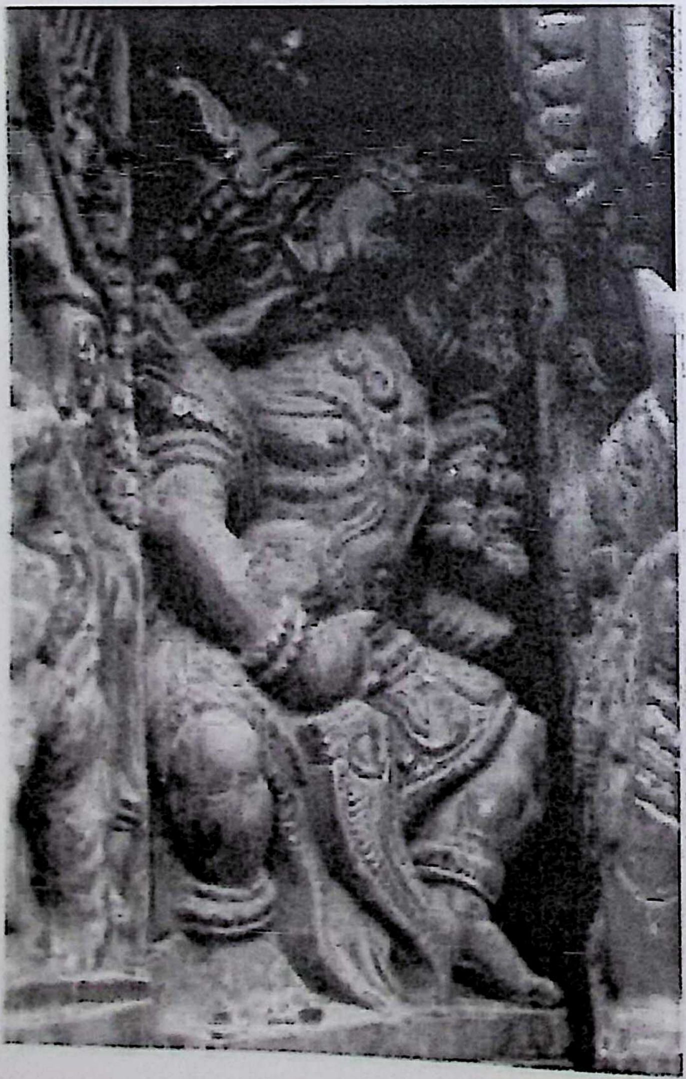
Gajasura samahara murti :Shiva in dancing posture after slaying the Gajasura (see the elephant head below) from the devaratham at Mayilam in Tamilnadu.

That seemed a niche for veiled divini

Shivaganas

The shivaganas and bhoota ganas are the devotees of Lord Shiva and hence are depicted in dance posture in the devarathams. In one image a beautiful Shivagana is seen seated with an mridangam on his lap and the right hand striking the drum and the left hand with a stick about to strike the other side. Some of the Shivaganas are seen to play the drum, blow the trumpet, or play the stringed instrument. They are sometimes four handed instead of two handed.

In a rare panel presentation the shivaganas are shown in six different dancing postures. In the first figure he is wearing the decorated mukuta and blowing a bend trumpet. A snake is around his neck. He is wearing a diamond necklace; on his left hand is seated another Shivagana with a knife and mace. The Shivagana is seated and the legs are bent, with a lion cub at his right foot and a lady on the left foot. The second figure shows the shivagana with a sword and a shield in standing posture. He wears a mukuta decked with ornaments and appears to do a war dance with the snake draped around him. In the third figure the shivagana is four handed and seated on a mythological animal (similar to makara) holding a snake and shield in the left hands and the right hands holding a raised sword and in kunchita posture. He is seen to squat firmly on the yali. In the fourth figure the shivagana is seen with a serene face, the snake around the neck and two flying Vidyadharas on his two back hands, the two front hands relaxed on the sides. The shivagana is seen resting on the right toes and left knee. The fifth posture of shivagana is similar to a Vishnugana. He has a lion "s face with the sword and shield in the back hands and a knife in the right front hand and the left front hand holding the snake. The last figure on the panel is of a Shivagana appearing to do a dance with the mace in two hands. He is decorated with a mukuta, necklaces, beautiful beaded bridle around the waist and the upper thighs; a dagger firmly placed in the right thigh with a snake around the neck.

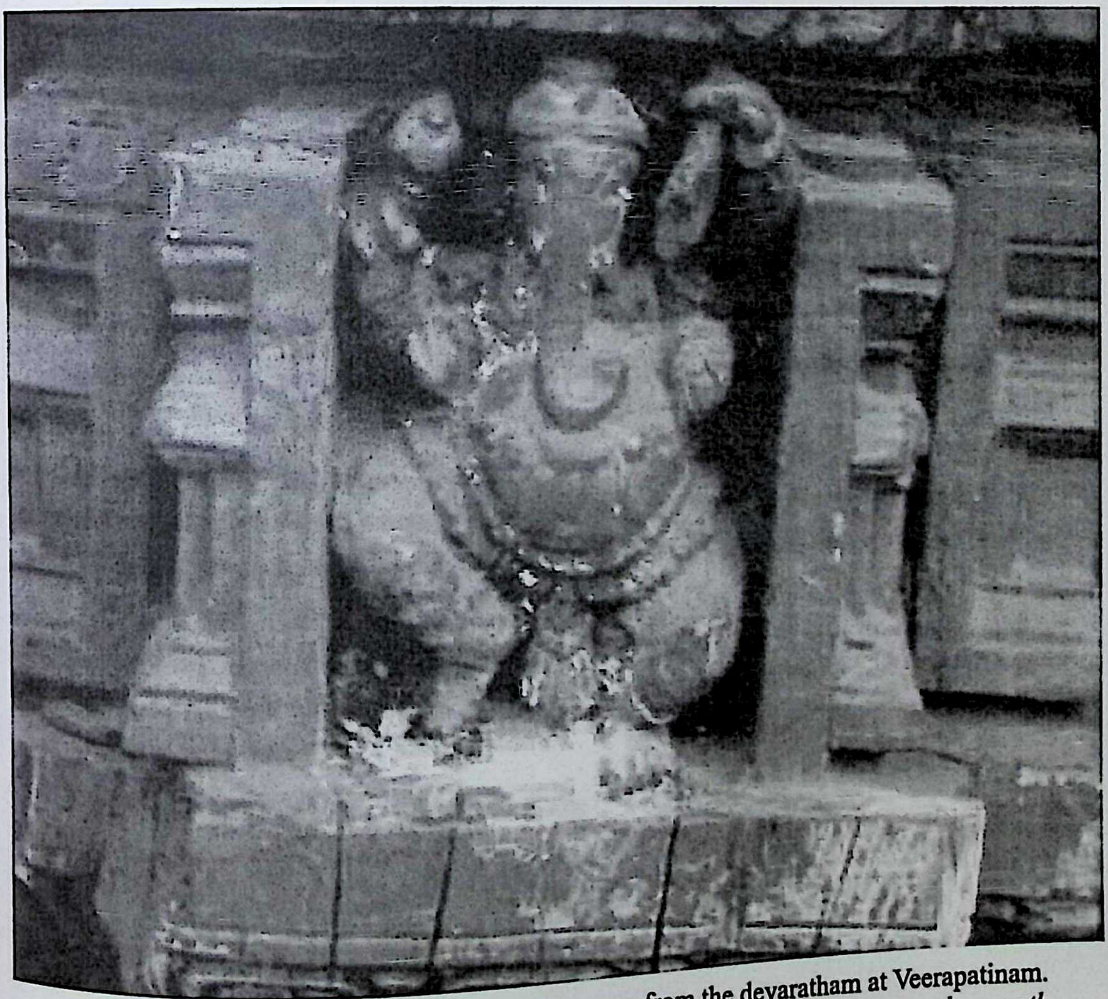


A warior in heroic posture with dragger in the right hand

Poured out in healing streams on indigent Life;

Nritta Ganapati

Being the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati, Lord Ganesha is a master of dance. He is presented as dancing Ganesha and called as Nritta Ganapati or Nadana Ganesha or Adum Pillaiar in Tamil. In this form he may have eight hands bearing the elephant goad, cakes, noose, an axe, tusk, a quoit called valaya and a ring. One hand is in the dancing pose, and the legs are bent in Kunchita pose. Most of these figures are solitary and independent. In some rare forms he is presented as "Pancha Mukha Nadana Ganapati". Here he has five faces and at the same time is in a dancing posture. Rarely is he present in the Urdha Tandava panel playing some musical instrument. In many of the dance presentations Lord Ganesha is invoked by the Ganesha Vandana at the start of the program. Elaborate dance compositions are frequently performed dedicated to Lord Ganesha and may be termed as Ganesha Tandava.



Nirrta Ganapati: Adum pillaiar, dancing Vinayaga from the devaratham at Veerapatinam.

A spot for the eternal's tread on earth

Vishnu – Dance Poses.

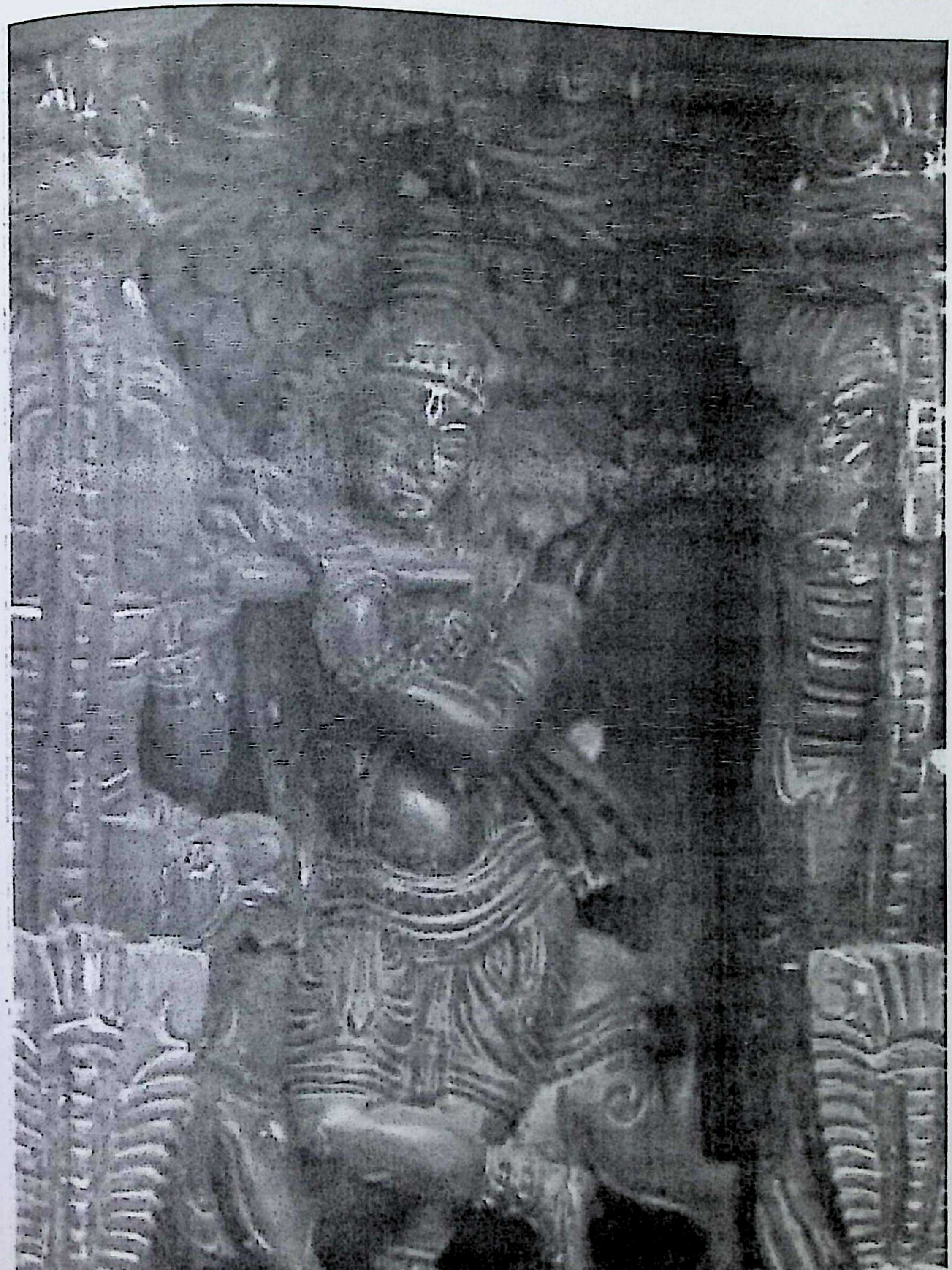
Balamurali Krishna Lord Vishnu is seen in many dancing poses in this Krishna Avatar. He is seen as Balamurali Krishna, playing the flute and enchanting the cows, gopis and the cowherd boys. Hence it is seen in beautiful tribhanga posture standing and playing the murali (flute) while the calf, cows and other animals are surrounding him. As **Muralidara** Lord Krishna is seen to play the bamboo flute (Murali) under the Kadamba tree captivating and drawing the gopis to him by his melodious music. In some panels Krishna is seen along with Radha, both are in dancing posture, while Krishna is simultaneously playing the flute.

Kaliadamana

Lord Krishna is said to have jumped into the depths of river Yamuna to teach a lesson to Kalia the great arrogant serpent king. Sri Krishna is seen to dance on the hood of the serpent "Kalia: while holding the tail in the left hand. The right leg is firmly placed on the head of the serpent. The left leg is slightly bent, the waist in classic tribhanga posture, the right hand in Abhaya hasta – blessing all those who seek his protection. Two Nagakanyas being the wives of Kalia are seen with folded hands on his side praying to the lord to spare the life of their husband. Lord Krishna is destroying all the dark forces of ego represented by the black serpent – Kalia and on surrender to him, he delivers and shows the path to the „Divine "

Sri Krishna as Kaliya Damana

A puritan God made pleasure a poisonous fruit.



Spiritual beauty illumining human sight

Sri Krishna as Venugopala

Devotees dancing

In many of these temple cars the devotees is shown dancing like a dancing sadhu with a beard holding a Chouli in each hand .The Chouli bearer and dwarapalas are also shown in classic tribhanga postures.

Male dancer

Arresting the passion of the climbing soul,

Lute Players

Almost all temple cars have figures of lute players. They are usually ladies standing in tribhanga posture with one leg across the other, holding a stringed instrument and playing it with both the hands. It is usually a Tanpura or a Veena.

A lady attendant holding the Tanpura or a Veena Amman ratham ,Villianur, Pondicherry.

Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;

It is a star lighting an ignorant sea,

Saraswati, Ganga and Parvati

Saraswati is usually seen to be seated either on a raised platform or on a lotus. She is seen to play the Tanpura or the Veena. She is sometimes presented along with Brahma in the Urdhava tandava panel and sometimes independently. Her back hand may hold a lotus or be in Abhaya hasta or hold a scroll. Ganga Devi is usually presented to be riding the mythological yali like figure called "Makara". She is in tribhanga posture and playing the Veena. She is usually decorated with necklaces around her waist and neck. Sometimes she is presented dancing finely and descending on to the locks of hair of Lord Shiva. This form of Shiva is called as "Gangadhara-murthi", literally meaning the One who holds the mighty Ganga. In an independent panel a Devi (mostly goddess Parvati) is seen in classic chouka posture with the hands joined together about to rise. "Dasavatar" which is a very popular item of most classical dance forms is specially performed in Odissi regularly, has been described elsewhere.

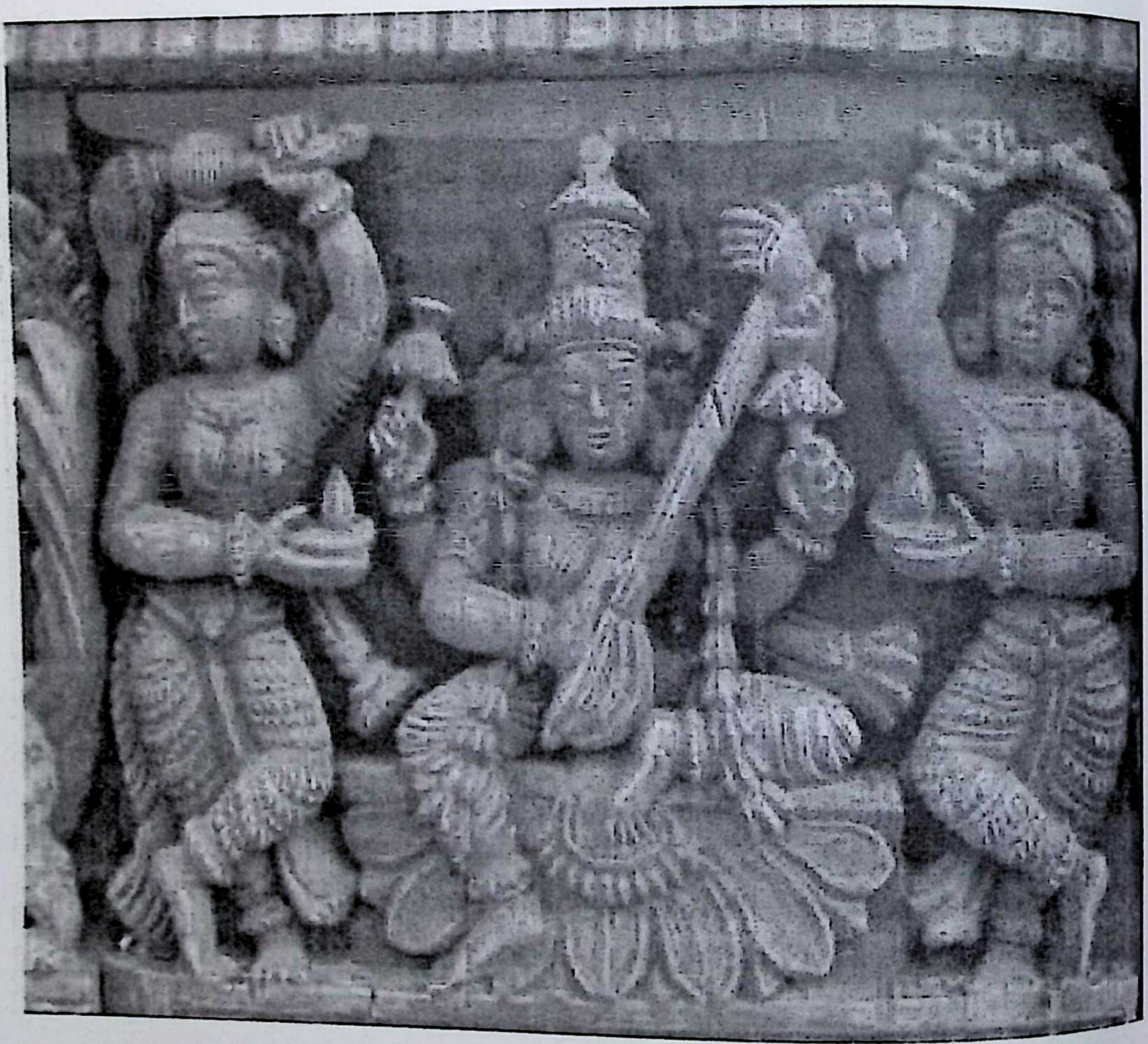
A dancing damsal in the ratham from Mayilam Amman (Parvati)

Delight, God's sweetest sign and Beauty's twin,

Amman in dancing posture Thirukameswar Kovil, Villianur, Pondicherry

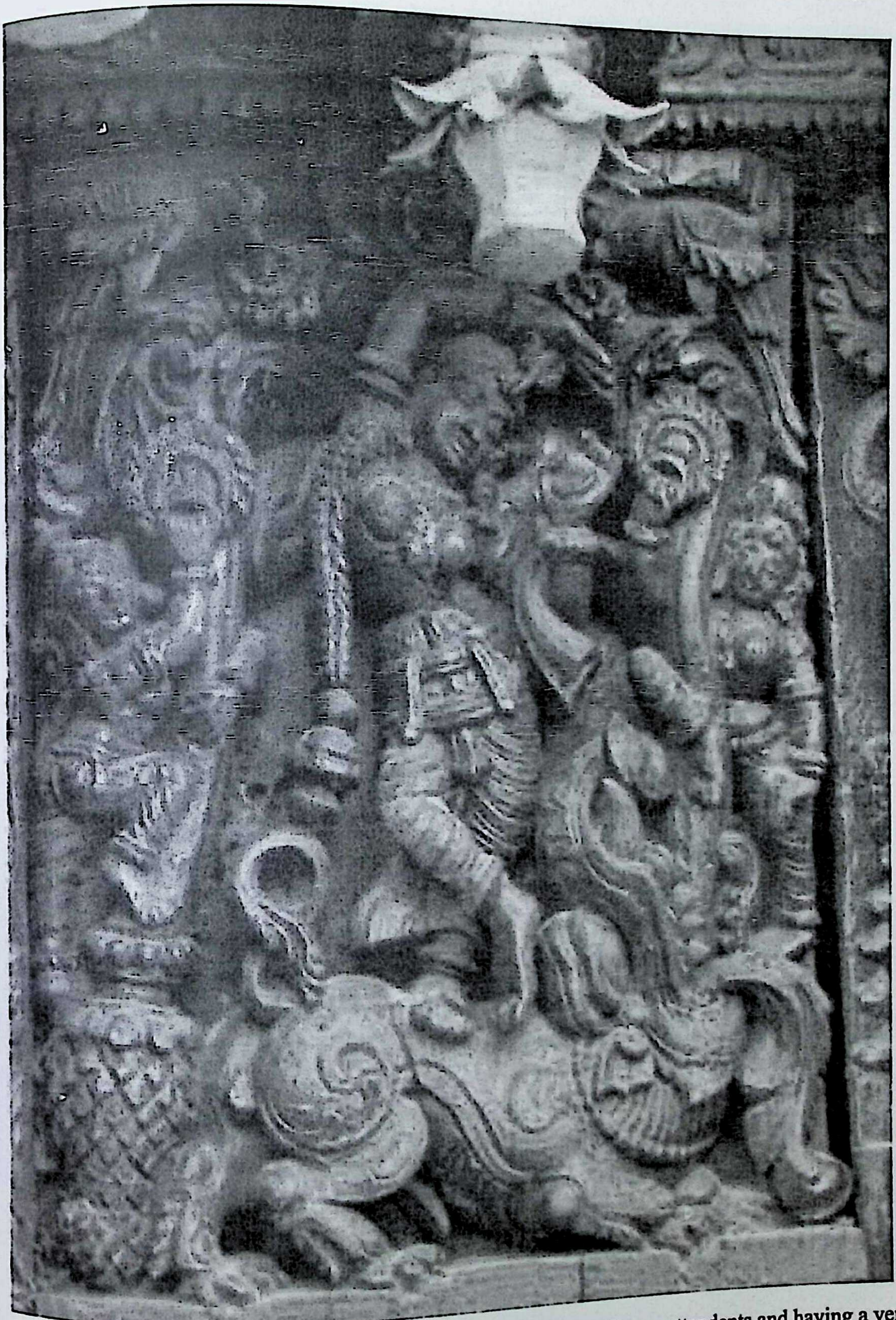
The excess of beauty natural to god-kind

Invariably the devarathams dedicated to Vishnu always have a panel devoted to the ten incarnations of lord Vishnu – the Dasavatar panel. The stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas etc are presented in dance forms in all the Indian classical dances. Some of the popular stories include Asthanayaki, Sita swayambara, Ravana badham, Suryastaka and Asthasambhu to name a few. These are also present in the devaratham.



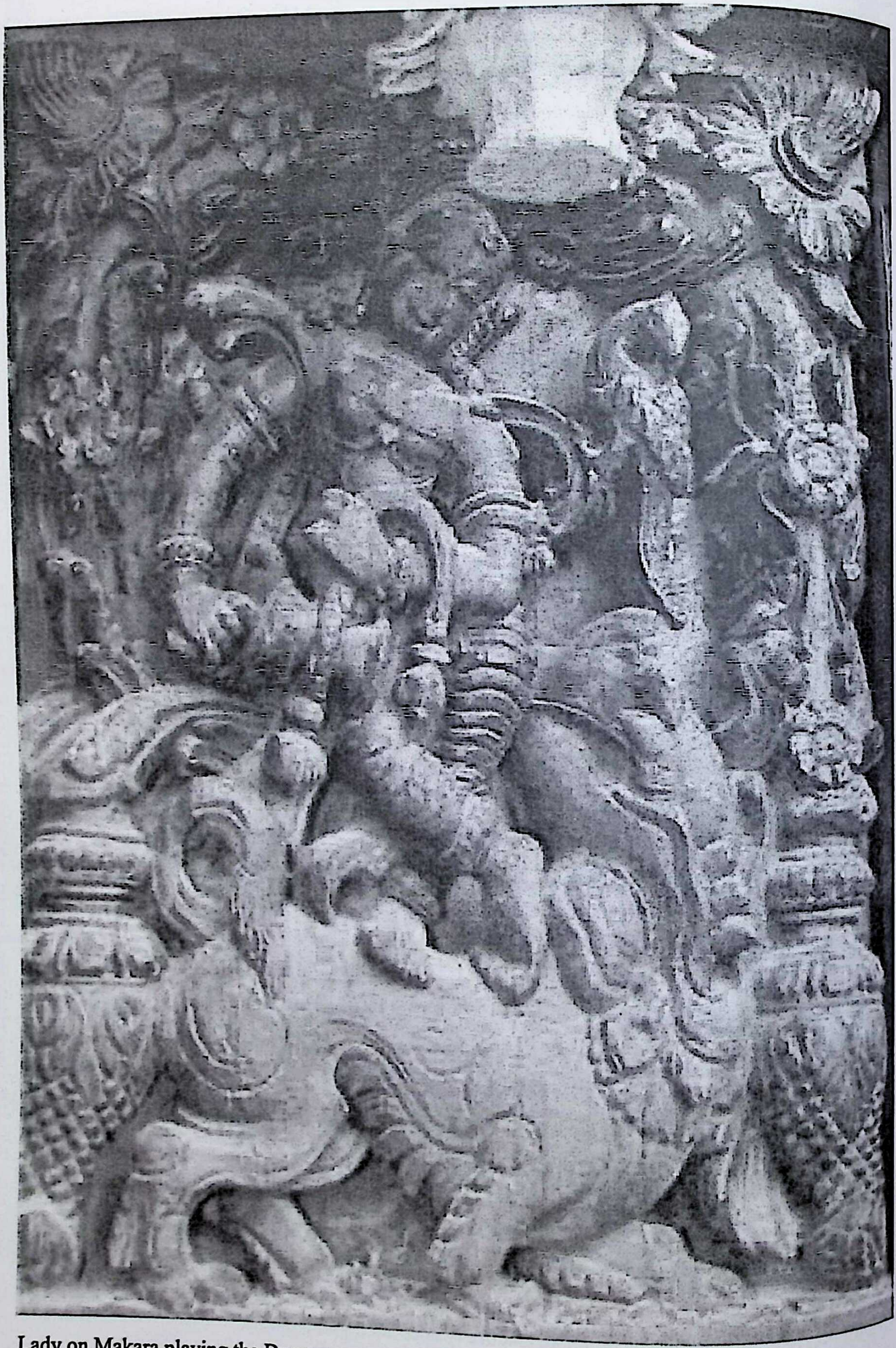
Godess Saraswati playing the Veena seated on a large lotus, holding two lotus in her back hands, and wearing a crown, with female attendents fanning her holding the oil lamps.

She has invented speech, unveiled a will



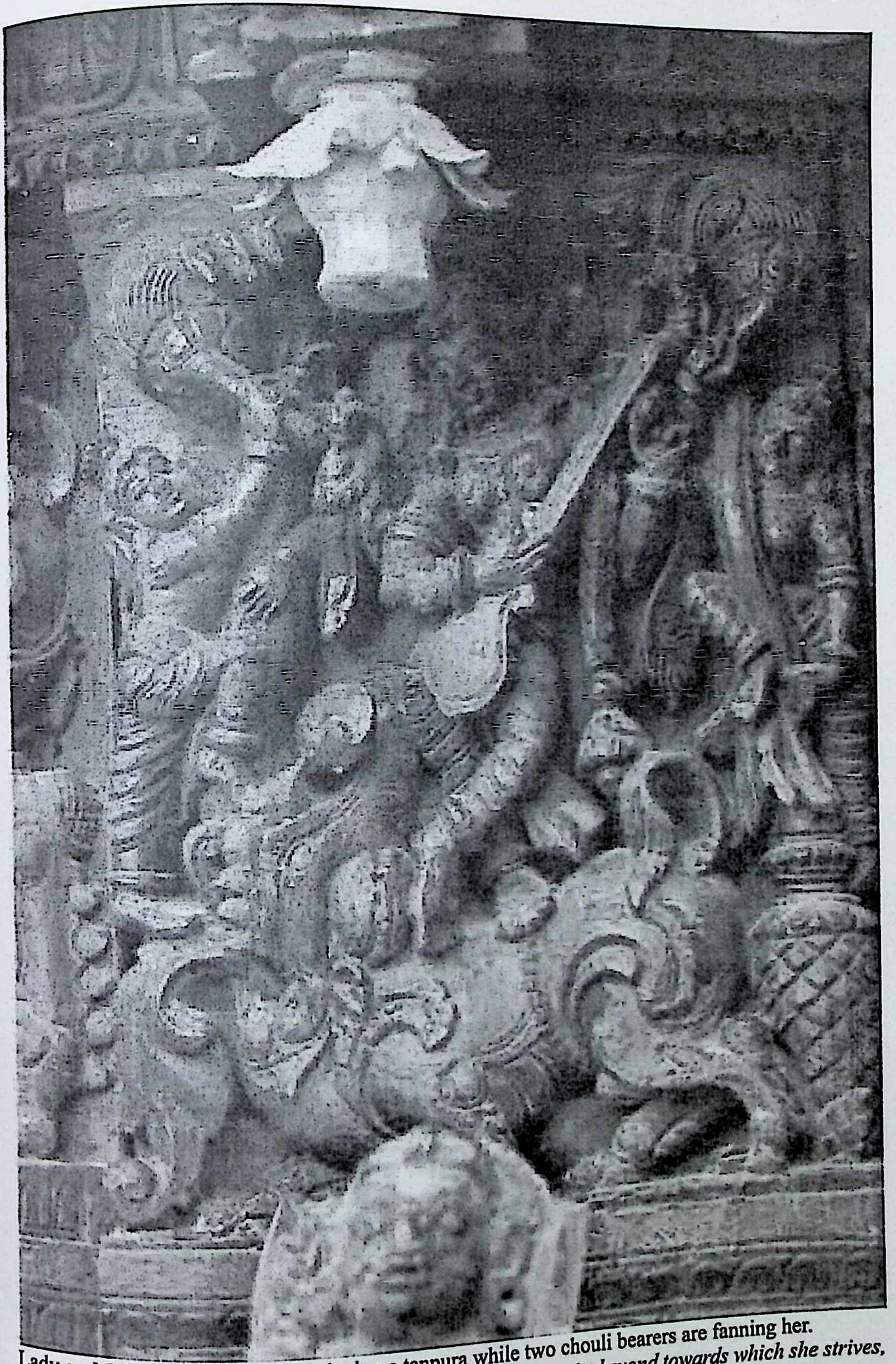
Lady on Makara in classic Darpani posture also in tribhanga with two attendents and having a very long pleated hair hanging, wearing an elaboratly decorated garmen

Her gaze is charged with a wistful ecstasy.

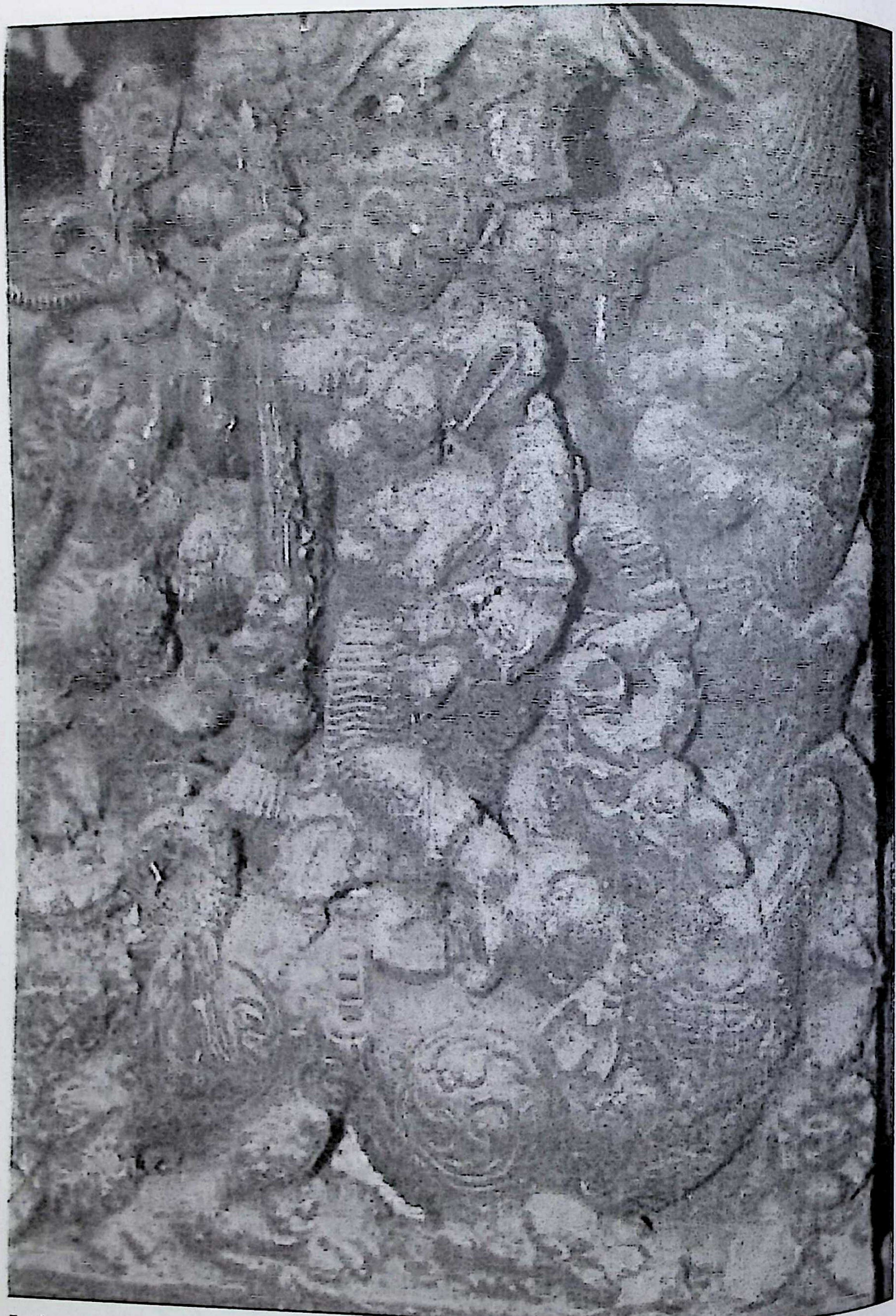


Lady on Makara playing the Damaru.

Something there waits beyond towards which she strives,

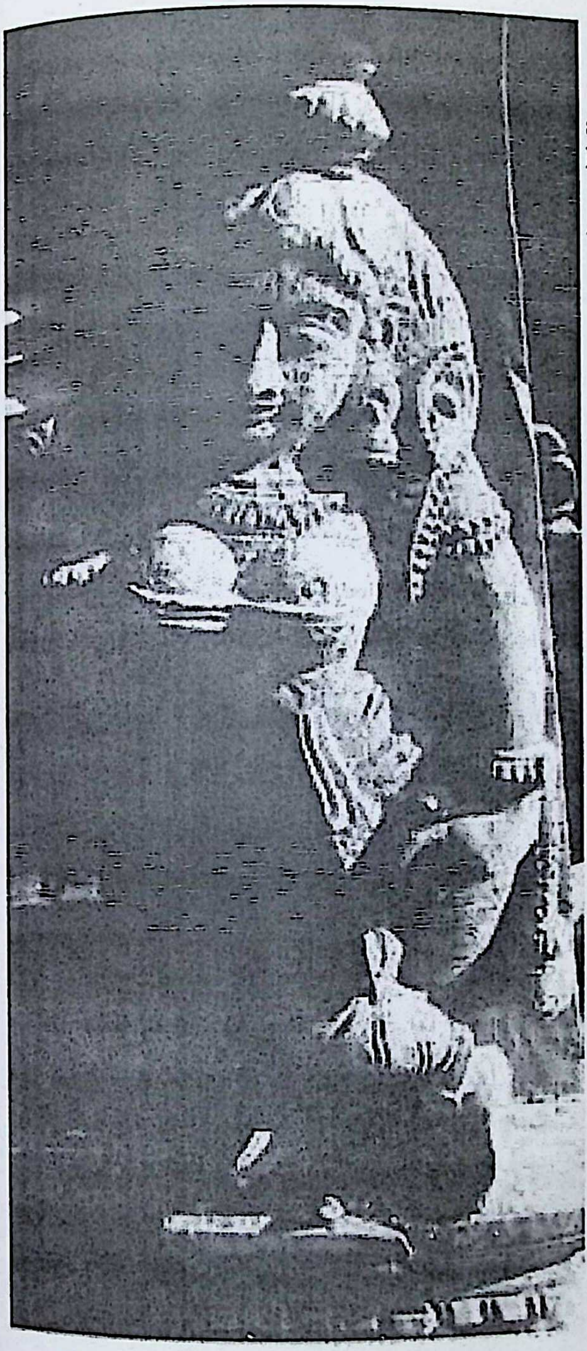


Lady on Makara in dwvibhanga playing a tanpura while two chouli bearers are fanning her.
Something there waits beyond towards which she strives,



Lady on makara from the Villianur temple, Pondicherry.

She has learned to weep glad tears of happiness



Woman carrying a pot (small pitcher) of water and standing in a dancing posture from the Sengeri kovil devartham, Pondicherry

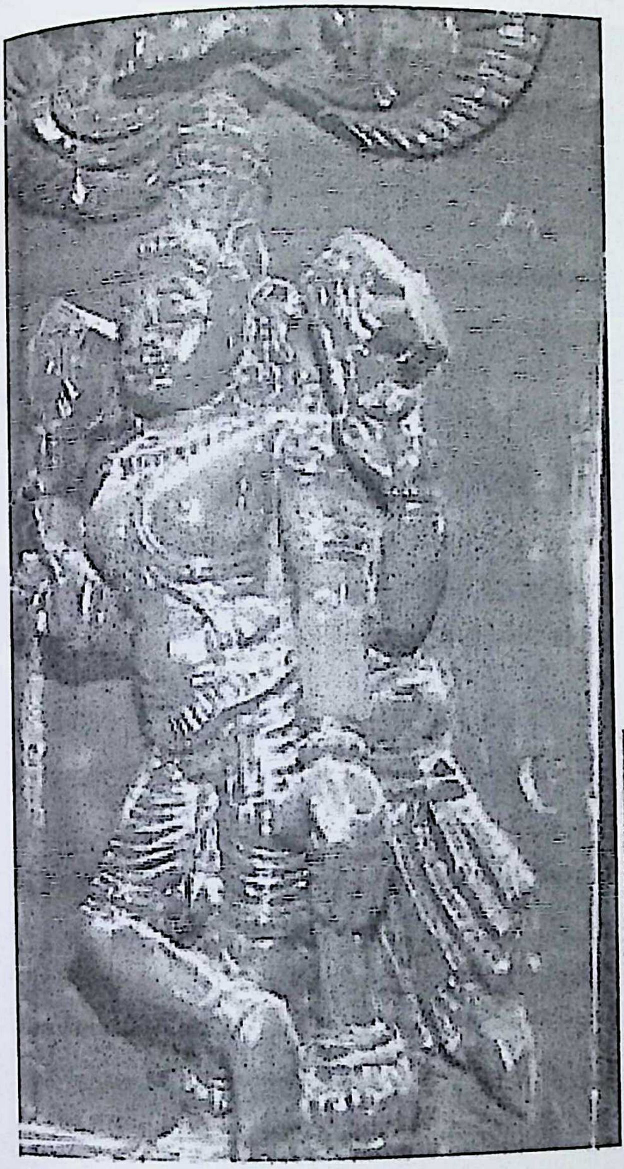
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;

Lady holding a veena in tribhangha posture

Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.

A soilder below a yali.
The labour of its stark unconsciousness

Dalamalika in tribhangha posture
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge

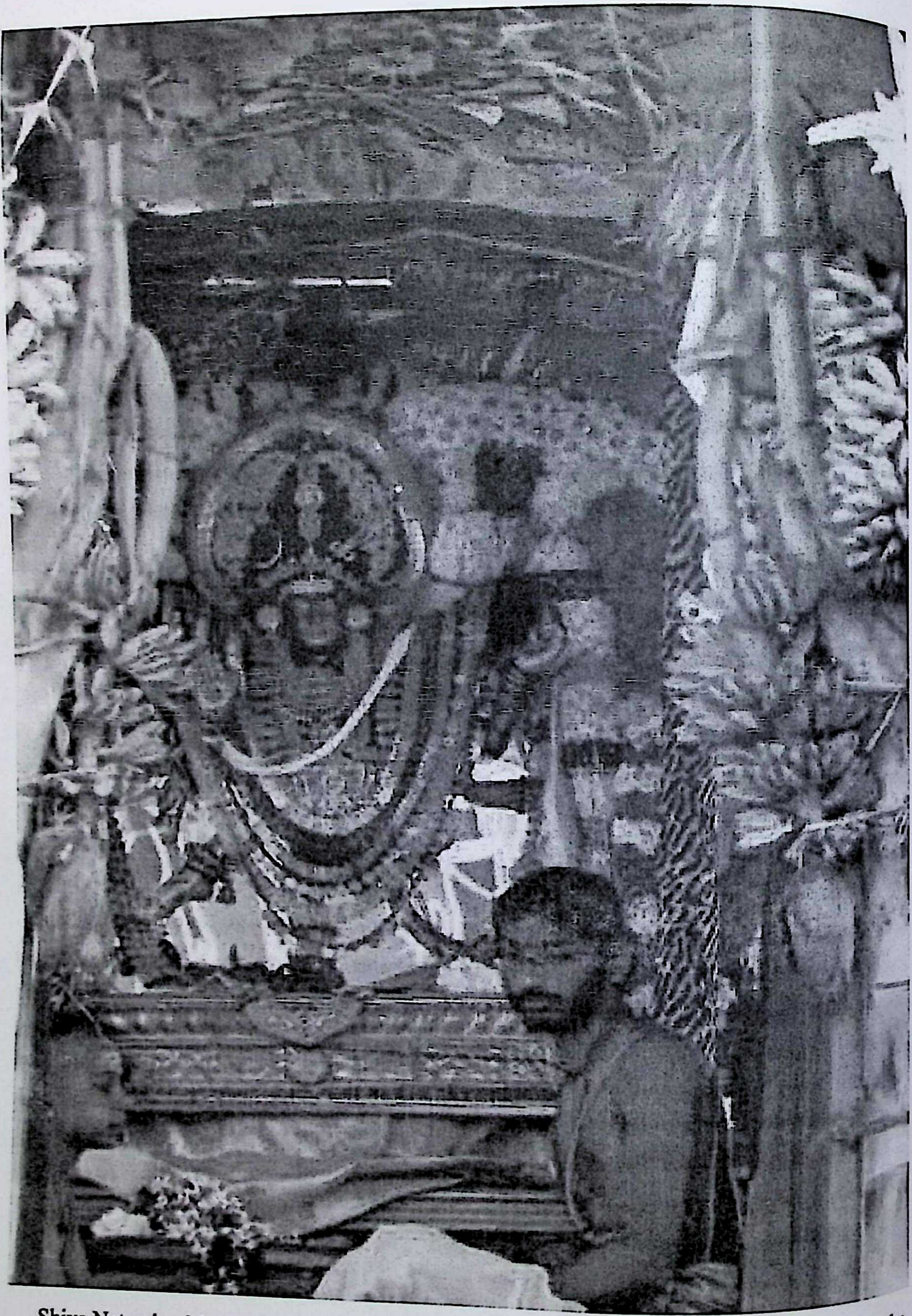


Dwarapala in dwibhanga posture

And, careful of the outward word and act,

Female dancer between two yalis

Lest all too soon should change again to bliss.



Shiva Nataraja - Moolaver (Main diety) of Chidambaram temple during the ratha uthsava on the Davaratham.

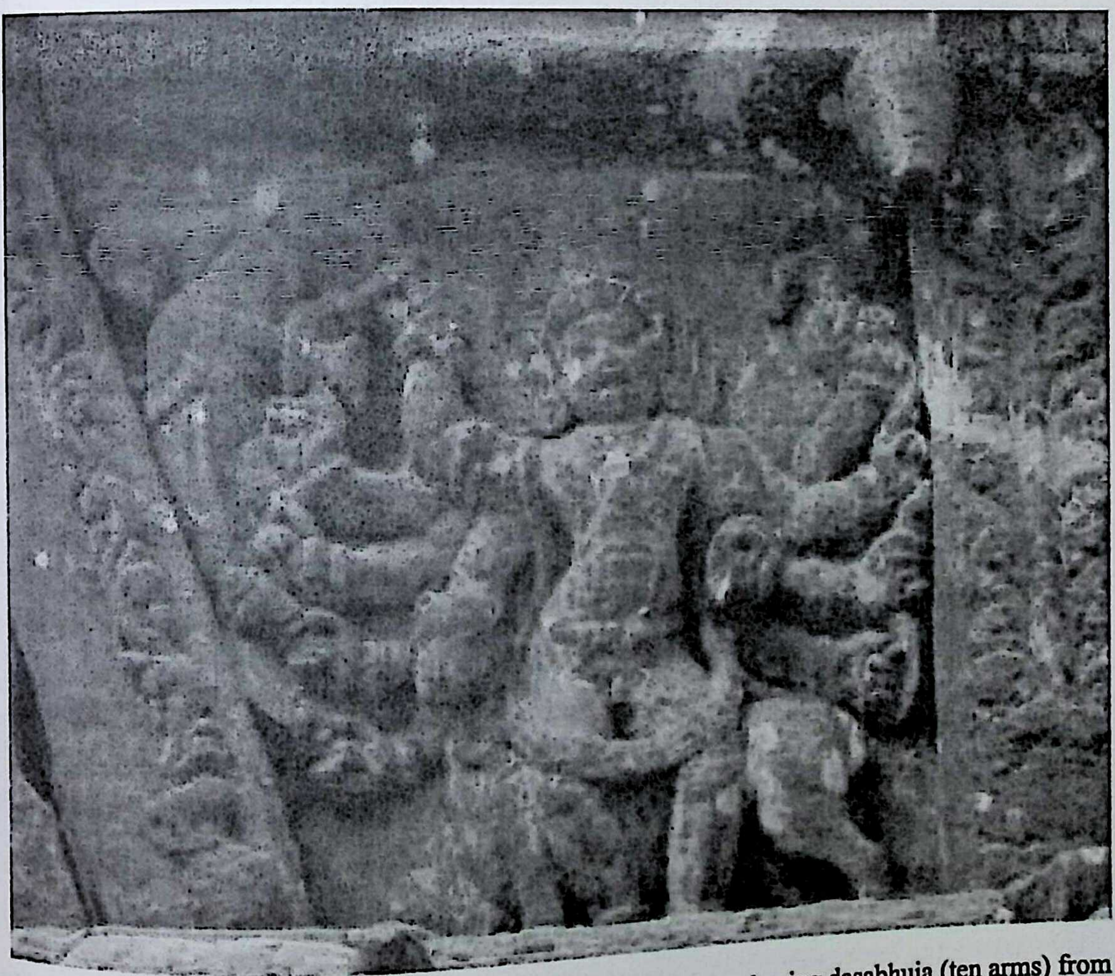
Chapter - VIII

Shiva

वागार्थाविव सम्पृक्तौ वागार्थाप्रतिपत्तये।
जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ॥

vāgārthāviva sampṛktau vāgārthā pratipattaye|
jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatīparameśvarau|| *Raghuvaṃśa 1.1*

I pray parents of the world, Lord Shiva and Mother Parvathi, who are inseparable as speech and its meaning to gain knowledge of speech and its meaning.



Shiva on Nandi (rishabavahana murti) holding many wepeons having dasabhuja (ten arms) from the Kamatchiamman koil Puducherry.

He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm, Lord Shiva forms one of the trinity of Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. He is considered to be the lord of destruction along with Brahma the creator and Vishnu the preservator. Lord Shiva is most commonly worshipped in the form of "Shiva lingam". Lord Shiva is always seen to wear the snake around his neck, having four hands, two hands holding a damaru, agni (fire) and other two in Abhaya and Varada mudra. Shiva is also the lord for procreation. He holds the Agni and the lord of destruction; all old order needs to be destroyed so that new can be created. The Shiva lingam appears as the phallus around the yoni; hence he is the lord of procreation.

The "Sowyambhu lingam" are the Shiva Lingam which has apparently self emerged at different places. Each of them has a historical story around them. These are usually discovered by a rishi and then they are installed. Nearby people start worshiping the lingam and later on a temple is built around it. The most popular and revered is the lingam formed by the ice and snow, deep in the Himalayas at Amarnath. The other popular shiva lingams are the "Jyotirlingams". There are popular legends around these Jyotirlingams. In one point of time Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu came to Shiva to decide who among them was greater. Then Shiva told that whoever finds the end or the beginning of Him will be declared greater than the other. He converted himself into a fiery column of Jyoti (light) and Vishnu on Garuda and Brahma on swan went to find the beginning and the end respectively. After a very long time both returned without success, Vishnu told the truth but Brahma told a lie that he could reach the destination. Shiva cursed Brahma that he will not be worshiped from then on and that Vishnu will always be revered and worshiped. Thus we hardly find any temple dedicated to Brahma. The Shiva Lingam seen in the devaratham are present depicting many stories, most of these depict the story of Parvati worshipping the Shiva Lingam. She makes a Shiva Lingam from the sand near river Pallar and worships it daily with flowers. She sits on meditation with only Shiva's name on her lips. She goes through many austerities to gain the hand of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva tests the sincerity of Parvati by sending torrential rain and flooding the river in an attempt to destroy the Shiva Lingam made from the sand. Parvati as Uma embraces the Shiva Lingam to prevent it from being washed and destroyed. Finally Shiva is satisfied about the true love and sincerity of Uma and marries her. Hence it is seen in ratham as Uma embracing the Shiva Lingam. The other forms of Shiva Lingam are the adoration by the cows, deer, peacock, spider and elephant. This signifies that Lord Shiva is also the god of all the animal kingdom. All the Shiva Lingams are always stationary except the shiva lingam on the devarathams which become moving Shiva lingam during the rathayatra when it is known as "Chalanti-Lingam".

Mukhalingam and other Shiva Lingam

There are eight forms of Shiva Lingams and the popular among them are Nagalingam, Panchamukha Lingam and Bhuja Lingam. The Panchamukha Lingam as the name suggests is self-explanatory and has five faces on the lingam with four in the four cardinal directions and one above. Each of these faces has different names like

Sadyojata – West, Vamadeva – North, Aghora – South,
Tatpurusha – East, Isana -- Skywards

Another popular Shiva Lingam is the Chaturmukha Lingam, with four faces which is supposed to represents Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara and Surya.

Sadashiva

Sadashiva is a form of Shiva with many faces and hands, more popularly it has five faces hence is called as Panchamukha Shiva, Panchanana, Panchavakrata and Panchasaya. He has ten hands and is seen standing in Samabhanga and if seated he is in Sukhasana. The heads may be in single or two rows; he wears the jatamukuta with the snake around his neck. The front hands are usually in Abhaya and Varada mudra while the other hands may hold several weapons.

Mahasadashiva

It is a polycephanous form of Lord Shiva. It symbolically represent that Shiva has uncountable forms just as his innumerable names which are designated as sahashranama (thousand names). It is present in the temple rathams with twenty five faces in multiple rows usually five rows of one, three, five, seven and nine heads. Thus he has fifty hands. He wears the skandamala and the front two hands are in Abhaya and Varada mudra.

Brishava vahana murti –Shiva

Shiva as Vrishava (Brishava) vahana murti is either alone or with his consort Amman (Parvati) and is seated or standing near his vahana, Vrishava the bull. Vrishava is faithful and serves his master without any expectation and thus symbolically shows a path for the freedom from the cycle of repeated births and deaths if one remains focused on serving the master (lord Shiva), whose grace frees one from all the vasanas. Shiva is the destroyer, protector and progenitor. Shiva is the inspiration, he is the seed (represented by the bull) for the new that is to come into the world.

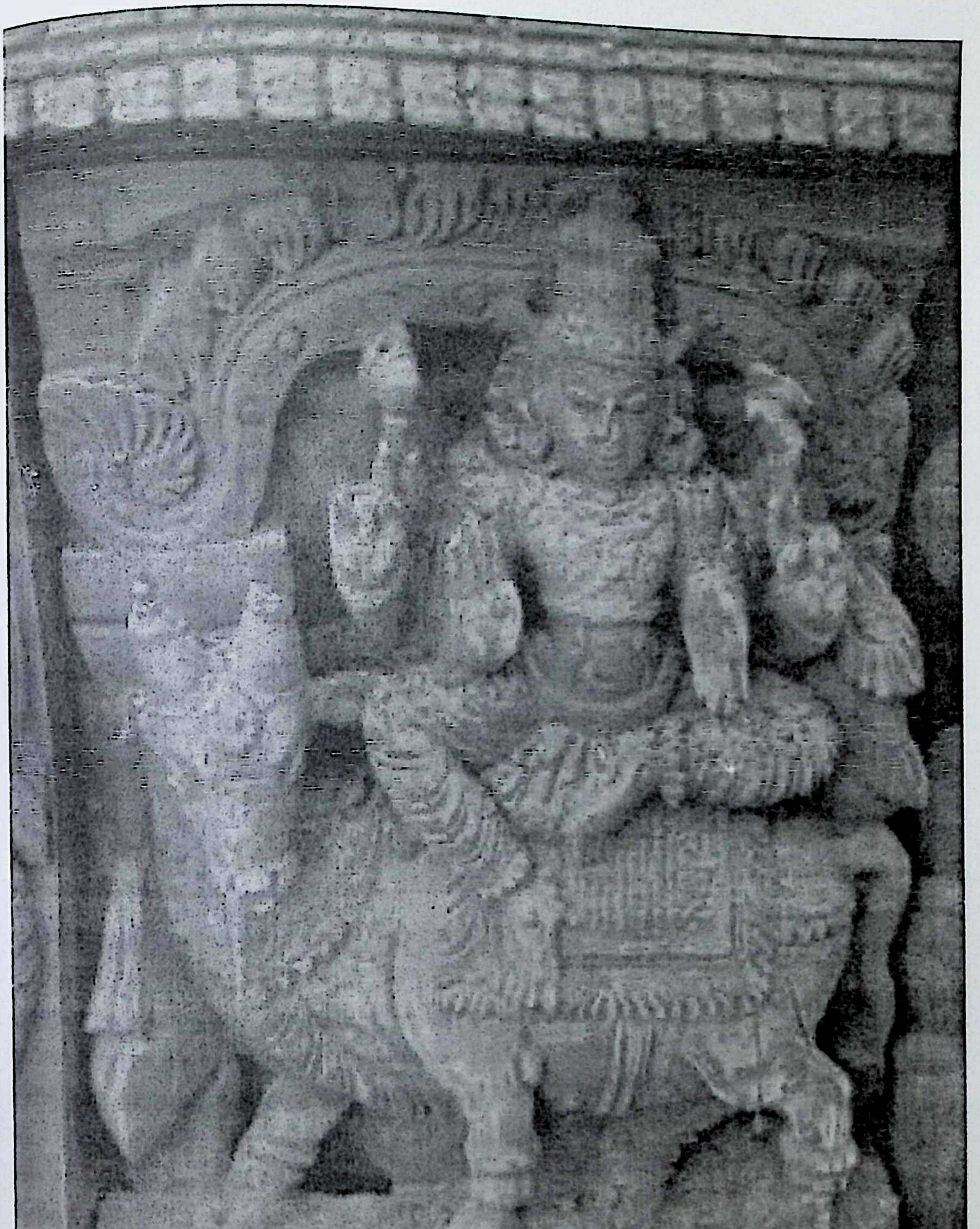
In this presentation Shiva and Parvati are always serene, peaceful and beautiful in appearance along with their vahana –the Vrishava. In all the Shiva temples Vrishava vahana is seen seated at the entrance and facing at his master. Vrishava is also the gate keeper and mount of Shiva. He is also known as Nandi. As Nandi he is seen with a bull's face and a human body with four hands, two holding the Miruga (antelope) and parasu (axe) the other two in anjali hasta (folded hands). Vrishava comes from the word "Vrisha" which means Dharma or righteousness; hence it is Nandi who is worshiped at the entrance of all Shiva temples. He is also the first among the shiva ganas, their leader and guide.

Please also read more about Nandi (Nanadikeswara) in the chapter on dancing sculptures from the temple rathams.

Bhikshatana Shiva

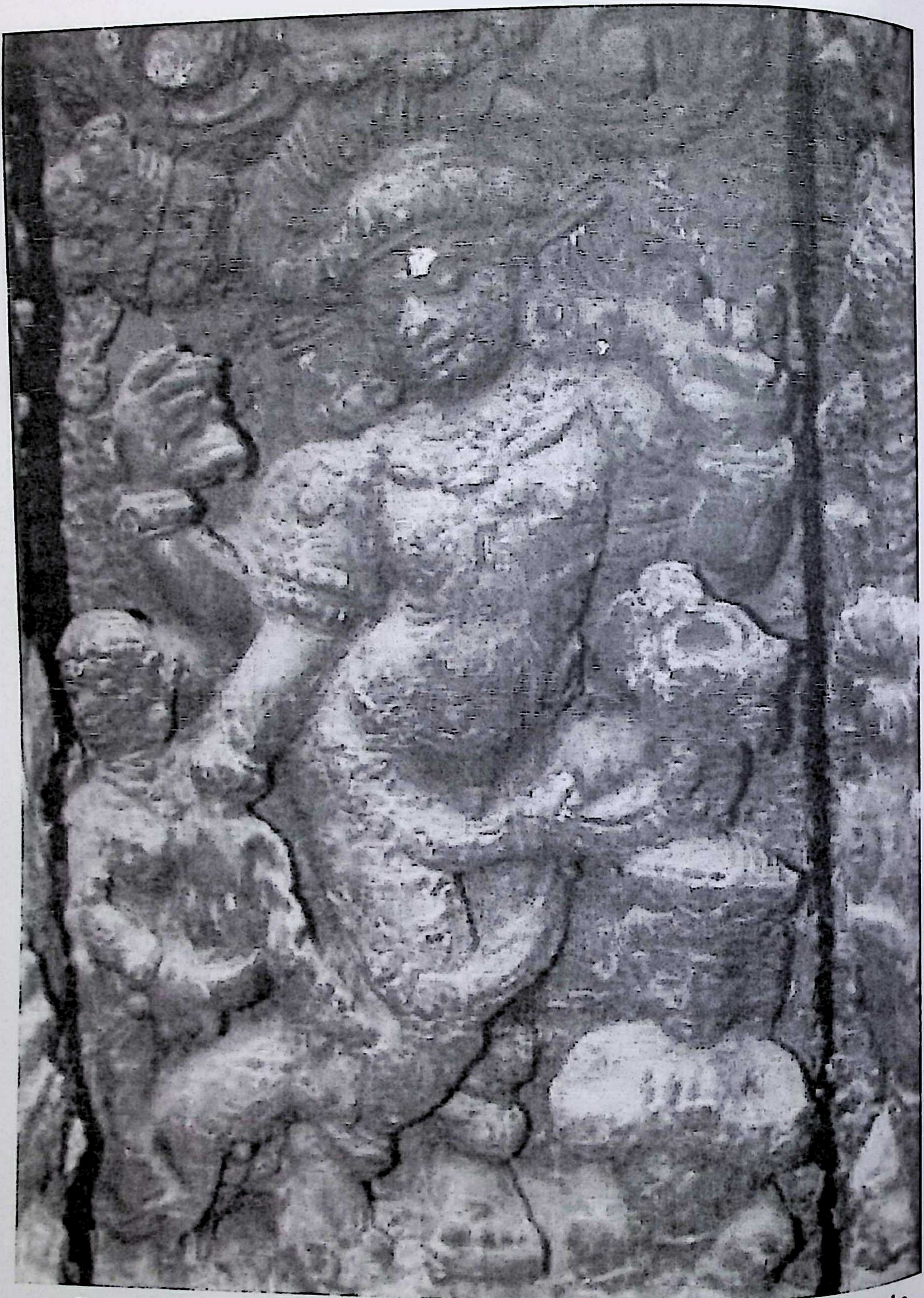
Shiva as Bhikshatana is a beggar asking for alms. There is an interesting legend associated with this form of Shiva. In one legend Shiva, while on a hunting trip looses a signet ring, Parvati suspects that Shiva might have spent the night elsewhere and closes the door on him. Shiva is forced to become a mendicant and takes to a begging bowl; whoever sees him is attracted by his charm and men, women and children follow him. On hearing of this Parvati realises her folly and dances to entice shiva. Shiva is more then pleased to reunite with Parvati. This is enacted in the Kapileswar temple in Chennai every year at the end of the Arupathu Moolavar festival.

There is a second legend that says that rishis stopped the practice of prayers and puja to the gods and presumed only work or karma was enough to reach moksha. Shiva took the form



Shiva seated on the bull holding agni on the left hand and lotus on the right hand, the front hands are in abhaya and varada mudra

The calm persistent vision of the One



Shiva as Bhikyatana, in a dancing posture holding a bowl on the left hand and a damaru in the right hand and right front hand on the bowl held by a female attendent and agni on the left back hand with a devotee praying on the right side.

Escaped from surface sight and mortal sense of Bhikshatana and started begging. He appears naked as an extremely beautiful, charming young mendicant, dark in color with ashes on his body, begging for alms. All the wives of the rishis start following the beggar, which enrages the rishis and they start ablations (homa-sacred fire) to raise forces to destroy Bhikshatana. They hurl fire, deer, tiger, snake and demon on him in an attempt to destroy him. He kills the tiger and uses its skin to drape himself, the snake becomes his garland, holds the deer head and the fire in his hands, controls the demon under his foot, and plays the damaru and reveals his true form- Shiva as Nataraja in Ananda Tandava. The rishis realise their mistake and pray to Shiva.

Thirupurantaka Shiva

Shiva as Tripurantaka literarily means the one who brings an end or “anta” of Tirupura or the three cities, as the destroyer of the three cities. There is a symbolism behind the legend. In this legend the three sons of the king Tarakasura wanted to be invincible. The sons Tarakaksha, Kamalaksha and Vidyumali did extreme penance or tapasya to please Lord Brahma and were also great devote of Lord Shiva. When Lord Brahma was pleased and offered boon of their choice the asuras asked; "Lord we wish for three fortresses, the first fortress must be made of iron and it should be on the earth, the second one should be made of silver and float in the skies and the third fortress must be made of gold and must fly in the heavens. The forts will be separate from one another and must align together only very rarely. Only a single arrow which can bring all the three forts together and burn them should be able to destroy us". The asuras believed that they have tricked Lord Brahma to have given them immortality as it would be very difficult to destroy such a city. Immediately the three brothers started living in their cities and were peaceful for a long time, but gradually they were back to their ways of destroying and plundering and harming all the creatures of the universe, the humans and devatas alike. The devatas could not defeat the asuras nor destroy their cities. They prayed to Shiva to destroy the three asuras along with their cities. Shiva asked the devatas to prepare the weapon and the required ratham. Thus Mother earth became the ratham, Surya and Chandra became the wheels, the mount Meru became bow, the snake goddess Vasuki became the string, Lord Brahma becomes the charioteer and Lord Vishnu the arrow. As the three purams or cities

Shiva as Tirupura shamhara murti also known as Tirupurantaka, riding a divine devaratham and becoming victorious over the three asuras

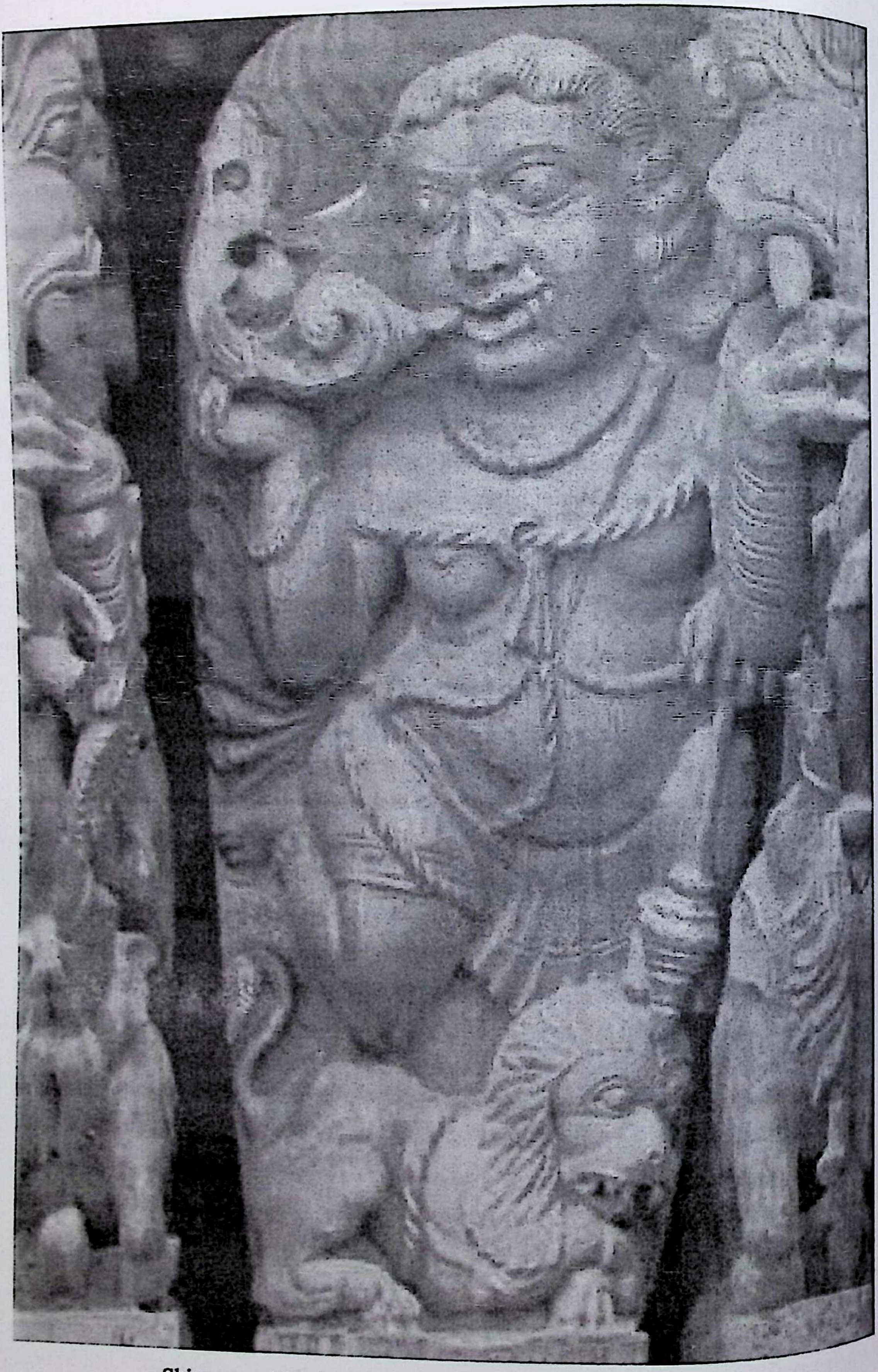
The great Illusion wraps him in its veils, align together Lord Shiva mounts his chariot and sends the arrow through them destroying all in a single shot. There is a slightly different version of the same story where Shiva destroys the cities by opening his third eye and Roudraksha is thus born. In another version it is said that Shiva climbs down at the last moment from the chariot and only just smiles and the cities start getting burnt and destroyed. Seeing this; the gods and goddesses who believed that they were contributing and were responsible for the destruction of the three purams realised their folly and the power of Shiva.

In the rathams and elsewhere Thirupurantaka Shiva is seen as riding on an ratham with his two hands holding an bow and arrow raised in a posture of releasing it any moment with three puram vertically aligned in front of him as three circles with a asura figure inside each of them to suggest the three sons of Tarakasura.

There is a great symbolism in this legend, the three asuras and their cities represent the three components of life and the attachment of ego to them and their need to be destroyed for us to reach the soul or the Divine hidden within. Even the devatas who are at a higher plane need to be alert of the ego creeping into their actions. It is only the Divine from whom everybody draws their powers, humans and devatas alike should aspire to be the perfect instruments of the Divine and try to participate consciously in the actions of the Lord.

The Shivaganas

The Shivaganas are goblins and are great devotees of Shiva. They are ready to obey their lord "s commands. Lord Vinayaga is also called as Ganapati, the chief of the shivaganas or simply ganas. Ganas may be considered as supernatural beings who travel with Lord Shiva, and are seen to cause delays, obstacles and distract the devotee and test their sincerity towards their master. Gandharvas are celestial musicians with wings and apsaras are beautiful female dancers who distract Yogis with erotic fantasies. Kinnaras are horse-headed musicians who scare travelers. Pretas are ghosts who haunt the places where they lived as mortals. Vetalas are body-stealing vampires. Bhairavas are animal-headed spirits who like to tease humans. Yakshas are nature spirits who dwell in trees, or deep under the earth. Dakinis are warrior women who travel with Kali. Nagas and naga kanyas are serpent below the waist and human above and hide treasures. All of the above are various ganas at the service of Lord Shiva. The



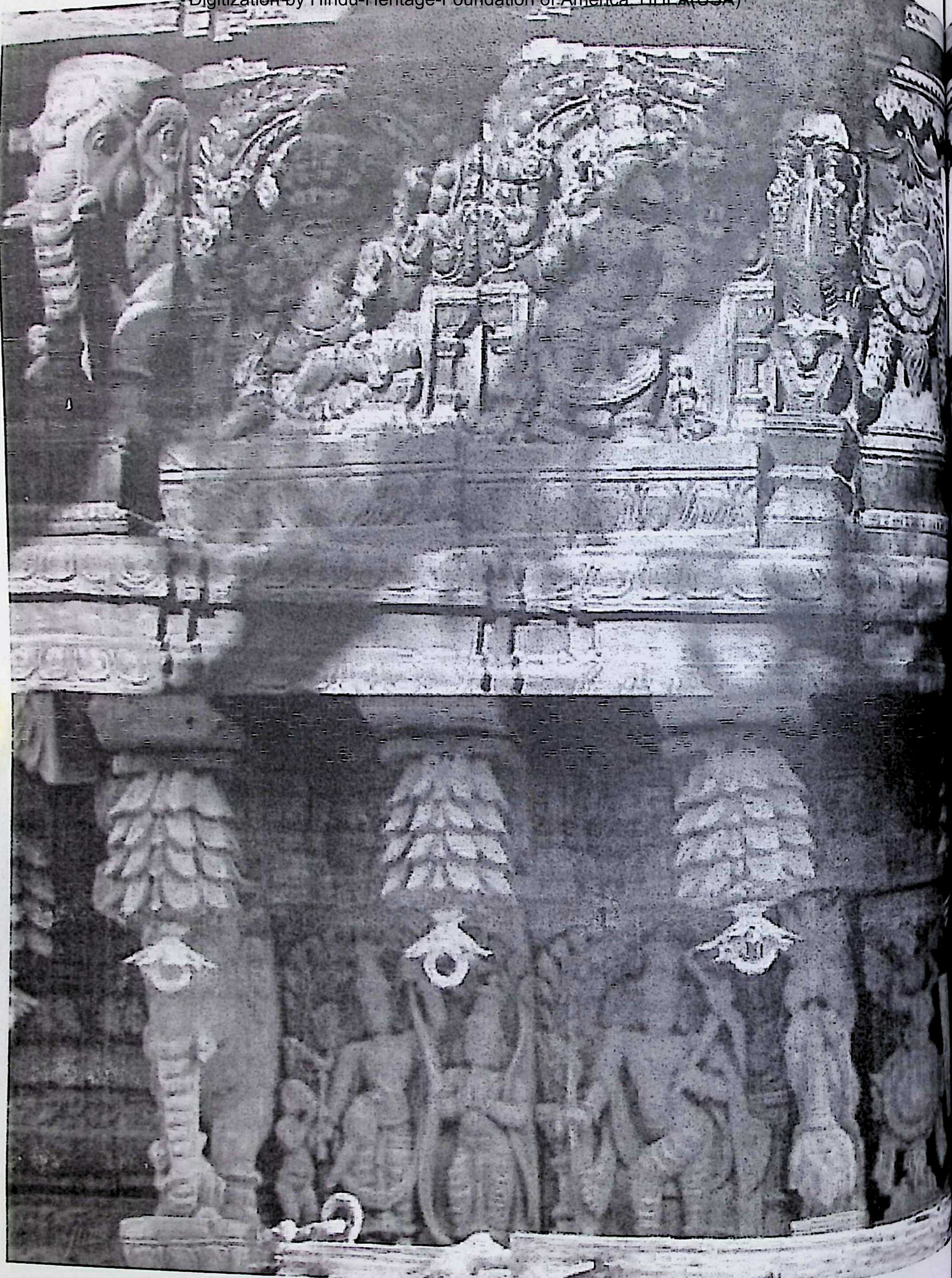
Shivagana blowing a musical instrument next to a yali appropriate ganas are carved out in the temples as well as the rathams. Invariably the shiva ganas are seen in a row in the temple just below the Vimana. In the rathams they form the first tier called as Bhootappar. They are five in number and symbolize the five elements of nature. They may be present at the corners and sometimes fill the spaces between panels. They are also made as very bright colorful figures sometimes fierce looking, sometimes with different parts from different animals, attached to the ratham before the festival and removed at the end of it.

Shivagana at the base of the devaratham with knifes in both hands from the Thirukameswar Shiva temple of Villianur in Puducherry

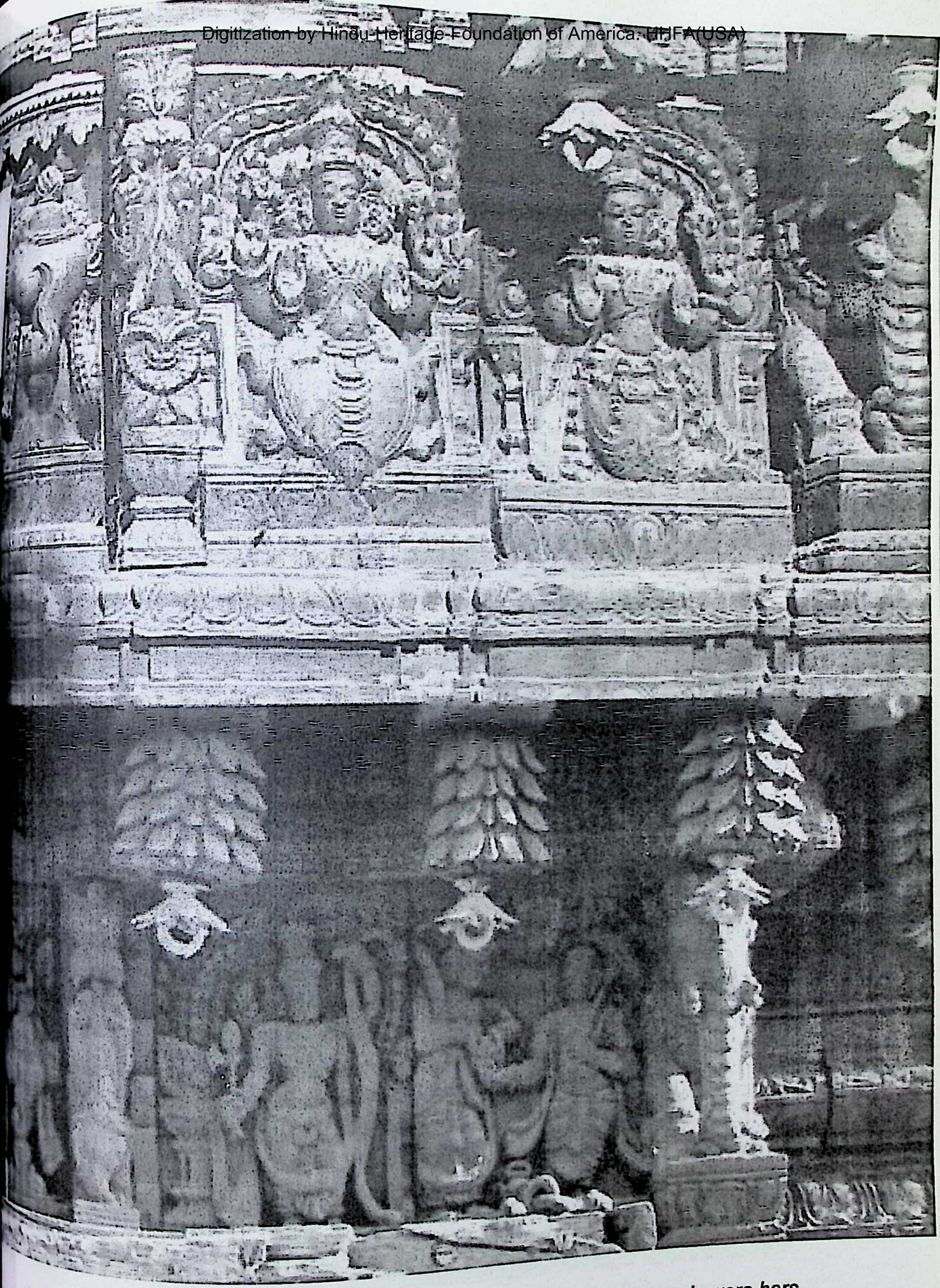
Traveller or pilgrim of the inner world,

Shivagana representing the panchabhoota or the five elements at the base of the devaratham from the Veerapatinam village in Puducherry.

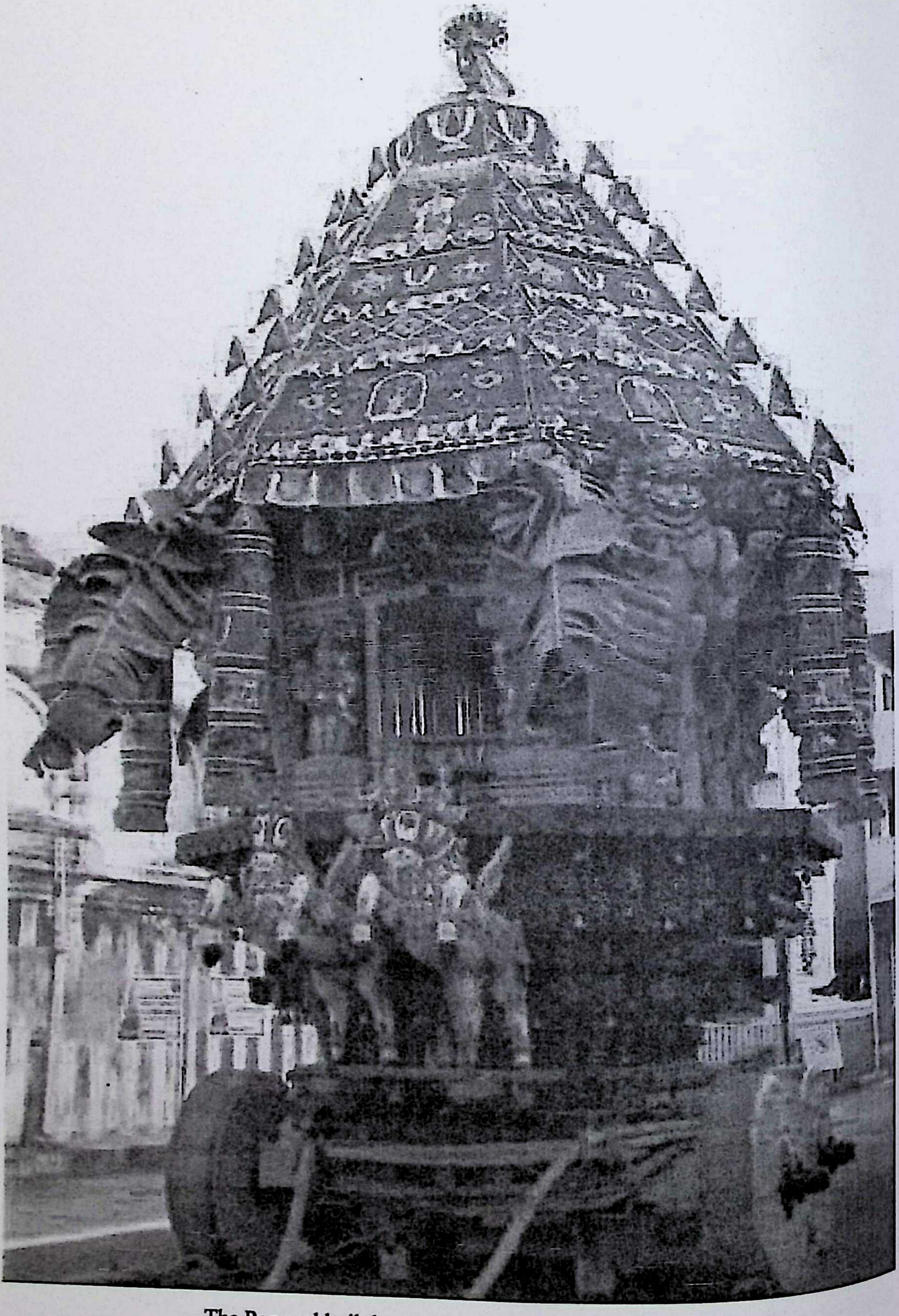
Forbidden to walk unveiled the public ways,



Dasavatar Panel: The sacred symbol of Lord Vishnu with the Conch and Disc; Kurma & Matsya on the right and Varaha & Narashima on the left; Below are Sri Rama, Balarama. Parasurama and Vamana respectively; from the devaratham at Sengerikovil, Pondicherry.



The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.



The Perumal koil devaratham at MG road Pondichery

Chapter - IX

Vishnu in Dasavatara

Introduction

Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara form the trinity of Hindu gods, Brahma is the creator; Vishnu is the preservator and Mahesh the destroyer. Even though the three of them are recognized to have separate functions, they are all „One ".

Vishnu as the Hindu god has been present since Vedic times. The vaishnavites consider Vishnu as the Supreme. He is called padma-nabha as the lotus (padma) is seen to emerge from his nabhi (mid naval point). Brahma is created by Lord Vishnu and assigned the role of creating the universe. Vishnu protects all the creatures of the universe by his blessings especially those who follow "Dharma". When the ills of "adharma" reach a breaking point he incarnates himself as "Avatar" to descend among the living to destroy the "adharma"

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्॥

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata|
abhyutthanamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham|| Bhagavadgītā (Ch. 4-7)

Whenever there is decay of righteousness O! Bharata and a rise of unrighteousness then I manifest Myself!"

Lord Vishnu as "Rama" is the hero of the great master epic „The Ramayana " and as Krishna of the Mahabharata. He is said to have three major forms, "Avatara", Vyasha and Murti forms. The ten incarnation of Lord Vishnu include the following; Matsya, Kashyapa, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna and Kalki. It is interesting to observe that there is a concept of Avatar and Avatari. The avatar is only an emanation or contains a portion of Lord Vishnu. Avatari is the complete form of Vishnu and only Sri Krishna is an Avatari. It is said that all the avatars are emanations of Sri Krishna. Some consider Balarama not to be an incarnation and "Buddha" as the incarnation. The Vyasha forms of

Vishnu are said to be Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Anirudha. The Murti forms are said to be twelve in number. They include Narayana, Keshava, Madhava, Govindha, Vishnu, Madhusudhana, Trivikarma Vamana, Sridhara, Hrishi Kesha, Padmanabha and Damodara.

Lord Vishnu has more than a thousand names or "Vishnu sahashranama" and each can be presented differently. So the artist or rathakara has wide scope to present Lord Vishnu in his in innumerable forms in the ratham. The incidents from the epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Dasa-avatar are very popularly presented in the ratham. Some of the other popular forms of Vishnu presented are Seshasayi, Adhinatha, Hayagriva, Vamana, Mohini, Manmatha, Caturmurthi, Gajendra-moksha, Garuda, Sudarsana, Ananta and Vishvakasena.

These are the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu and are usually presented as a single panel. They are usually present in the second or third tier of the ratham either in front or back, rarely on the sides of the ratham. The popular ten incarnations are Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, or Nursingha, Vamana, Parasurama, Sri Rama, Balarama, Krishna and Kalki. In some of the panels Balarama is replaced by Buddha.

A logical explanation of the concept of the Dasavatar is provided by modern philosophers. They say that the Dasavatar actually represent the evolution of life on earth. The evolution of life in water is the fish form, followed by Kurma or tortoise form, the life adaptation to the land from the water, Varaha or the boar form represents the rapid active movement of the animal life, Narashima is man-lion form representing the transit phase from animal to human. This is followed by the imperfect human form of Vamana or dwarf man. Then the life evolves to Parasurama or man learning to use the nature's resources for its own potential growth in the physical form. The next level is the growth of man's consciousness from the physical to that of vital plane and moral ethics seen in Sri Rama. Sri Rama is called as the Maryada Purusha as he sets the highest level of physical, vital, and mental ethics to be followed by mankind. Then comes Buddha, who shows the growth of the man's mind to a higher plane to realize God in the mental plane of consciousness. Buddha represents a withdrawal of man from the physical, vital and mental desires to attain God by way of "Nirvana". Sri Krishna comes to integrate all the previous levels of the physical, vital and mental to a possible higher level, in his discourse of Gita. This is called as the "Supermind" by Sri Aurobindo. Here all the clutches of the physical, vital, mental etc. truly disappear and a higher harmony is established and man can become "Supramental" being.

The Matsya Avatar

In the Matsya Avatara, Lord Vishnu took the form of a "fish". Here he is seen in the zoomorphic form with a human face with four hands holding the Conch, Disc, Mace, Lotus (Sankha - Chakra - Gada – Padma) and the rest of the body is that of a fish. Sometimes two of his hands may be in Varada mudra and Abhaya mudra. He may appear singly along with his other avatars or may be present singly, or with Lakshmi, or with Bhoodevi and Sridevi near him. The story behind this avatar is that the demon Hayagriva stole the sacred Vedas from Lord Brahma by deceit and hid himself in the depths of the cosmic ocean. The Lord had to take the form of a fish to dive into the cosmic ocean, kill the demon and retrieve the Vedas

Another popular description of the Matsya avatar is that Lord takes the form of a small fish. While Manu takes bath before his pooja, he sees a small fish in his kamandalu (a small vessel to hold water in hand for conducting pooja). The fish cries to Manu to protect him from the bigger fishes in the ocean. Manu thinks that a small fish can be easily kept in his kamandalu. He reassures the fish that he will save its life, but by the time Manu reaches home he hears the cry of the fish to save it from the small container holding it as the

Matsya Avatar
The enchantments that uphold the cosmic web

container had become too small for the fish. Manu immediately transfers the fish to a large container in his house and no sooner than he turns his head Manu sees that the fish has grown to occupy the vessel fully and thus takes it to the well in his house. Soon the fish is seen to grow and occupy the well; Manu guides the fish into a village pond only to see the fish grow and fill it up, Manu realises that the fish is no ordinary fish, and begs the fish to identify itself while leading it to the ocean. Then Lord Vishnu appears in has Zoomorphic form with the lower half fish and upper half human with Vishnu's face holding his classic insignia the Sankha, chakra and Abhaya mudra & Varada mudra. He directs Manu to gather one member from each species of all living beings from the earth, so that they can be protected by him from the forthcoming Pralaya or great deluge. It was time for the end of old yuga and the birth of the new "Yuga". An entire Purana called the "Matsya Purana" describes the incidents of that period and the greatness of Lord Vishnu, in this avatar.

Kurma Avatar

The Kurma avatar of Lord Vishnu is his tortoise form. The tortoise lives both in water and land. It has a very hard covering on its back to withstand adverse conditions and protect itself from other larger predators. The tortoise's average life span is much longer them the aquatic living beings. Lord Vishnu in his tortoise form is seen next to the Matsya avatar in all the panel presentation. He has taken this form to be the main support of the mountain Meru during the churning of the ocean of milk, with mount Meru as the pestle and Adisesha as the rope with gods on one side and the demons on the other side, so one can see Lord Vishnu in this tortoise form at the centre of the "Samudra manthana" (churning of the ocean) panel. This panel is usually seen in the ratham at the topmost

Kurma Avatar
To stay the wheels of Doom this greatness rose.

tier in either the right or left side. Lord Vishnu as "Kurma" avatar is usually seen in the classic zoomorphic form in the "Dasavatar" panel where his body is that of a tortoise and the face that of human with two or four hands holding the Disc, Conch or a lotus, in Abhaya mudra and Varada mudra.

He is also represented as a large tortoise in the front portion of the devaratham at the lowest tier. Here he forms the support of the entire ratham. He is a symbolic representation of Lord Vishnu who protects the ratham and gives stability (as in Samudra manthana) during its journey, the rathayatra during the festival of rathaushtava. Hence this form of tortoise is always decorated with flowers, chandan (sandal paste) and Kumkum (Vermilion). Kurma may be rarely presented nearby as Samhara murthi of Shiva, when Shiva takes this form to destroy the Kurma form of Lord Vishnu.

Varaha Avatar

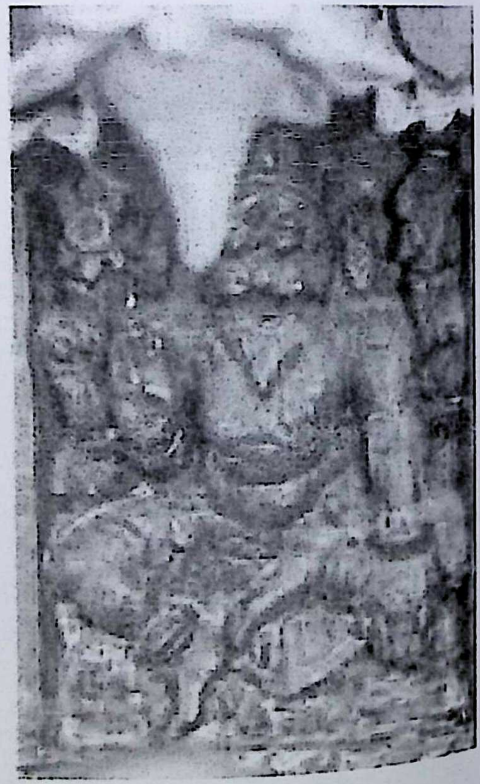
Lord Vishnu is said to have taken the Varaha or boar form to rescue Bhoodevi, the mother earth from the demons "Hiranyaksha" who had stolen her and dived in to the depths of the ocean. He kills the demon before rescuing "Bhoodevi" and returning her to her rightful place. The most common presentation of Varaha avatar is the presentation in the Dasavatar panel. In most panels he is present along with Bhoodevi hence called as Bhuvaraha. He may be present in other forms. He is present in the zoomorphic form with a boar's face and human body with two or four hands. The four hands are seen holding the Conch, Disc, Mace and Lotus. Two of his hands may be in Abhaya and Varada Mudra replacing the lotus and mace. He is usually seated with the right leg slightly bent and hanging from a pedestal and Bhoodevi sitting on his thigh under his protection. In some of the panels Lord Vishnu in his Varaha Avatar is seen to be rising from the depth of the ocean lifting

Varaha Avatar
And the almighty source of cosmic change.

"Bhoodevi" – represented by the earth on his snout with the club in one hand and Disc in the other hand. The above description of Bhuvaraha can be found in the "Vaikhanasangama" Lord Vishnu in his Varaha Avatar with Bhoodevi is also called as Adivaraha, Dharanivaraha, Manjita Varaha and Nirvaraha. "Yajmavaraha" is a form of Varaha Avatara of Lord Vishnu. He is seen to be seated on a simhasana or an elevated platform with the face of a lion on one side. His legs are crossed and folded in "Sukhasana posture" Bhoodevi is mostly seen to be seated next to him and sometimes on this left thigh. He holds the Lotus, Cub, Abhaya mudra and Varada mudra in the four hands. There is another form of Varaha called Pralaya-Varaha similar to Yajmavaraha. Some rare forms may be seen in which Lord Muruga is seen striking Varaha and the Lord emerging out with folded hands (anjali hasta), being redeemed form the boar form.

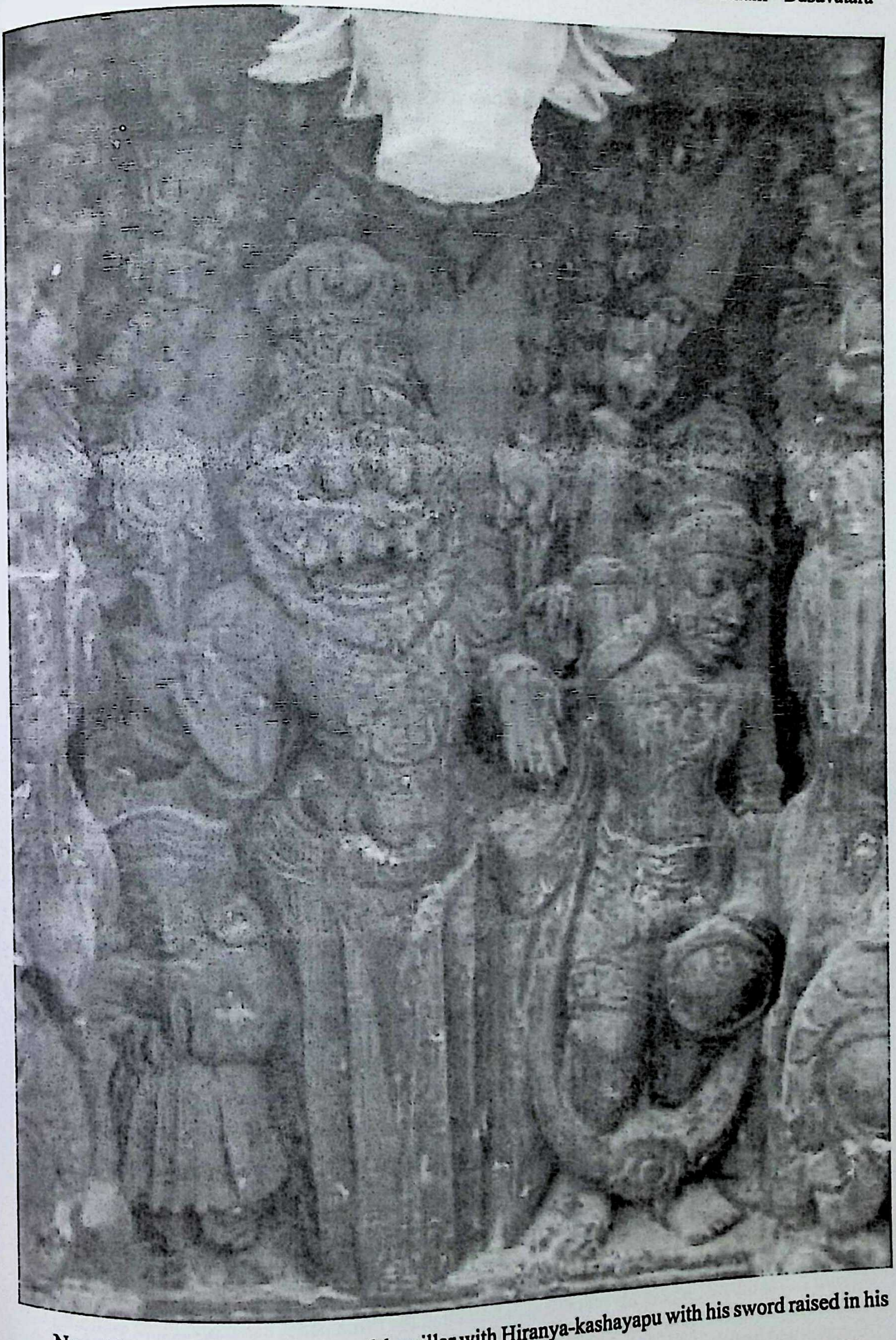
Narashima avatar of Lord Vishnu

It is the transition phase of the evolution of life on earth when man evolves from the animal. Hence it is a form in which half of the body is that of lion and other half that of human; hence the name Nara-Simha or man-lion form. This form of Lord Vishnu is very popular in all the temple cars. In the panel presentation he is seen next to the Varaha avatar. The story behind this incarnation of the Lord is that he took the form to protect his great devotee "Prahalad". The great powerful demon Hiranyakashyapu had gone through great deal of austerities and had prayed to Lord Brahma for a long life. When Lord Brahma appeared before him and granted him a boon, Hiranyakashyapu wanted to be immortal. As this boon was not granted he asked that he should not be killed by man or animal, during day or night, neither inside or outside any house, neither on earth or in the sky. Hiranyakashyapu believed that he had tricked Lord Brahma into giving him



Narashimha Avatar

To a divine ardour quickening the heart-beats,



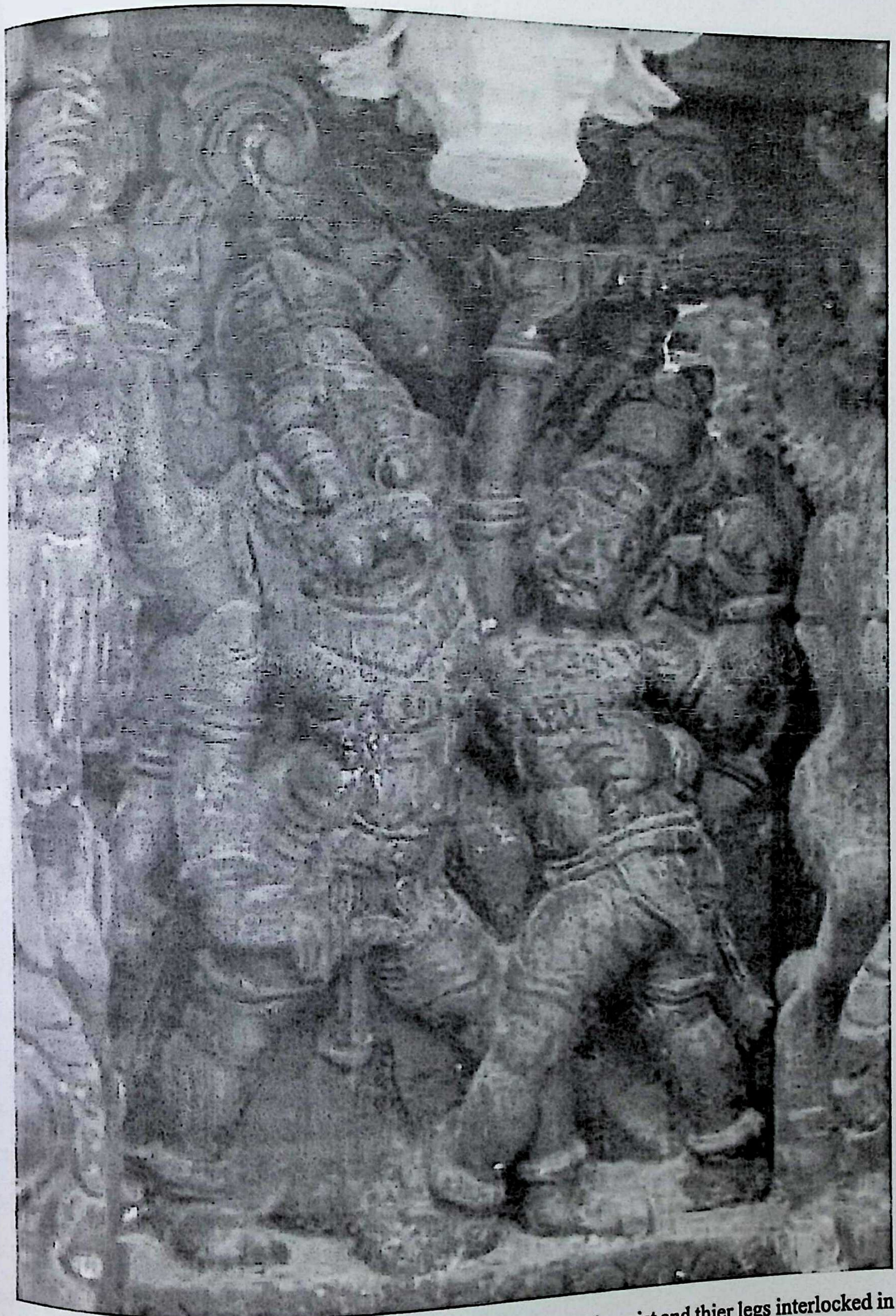
Narashima is seen to emerge out of the pillar with Hiranya-kashayapu with his sword raised in his right hand.

For ever in the memory of Time.

immortality. Hence he became very arrogant and powerful. He ill-treated all who opposed him and even defied the gods in heaven. He started to believe himself to be immortal and God and master of all the worlds. But to his surprise his own son Prahalad turned out to be a great devotee of Lord Vishnu Narayanan. When Prahalad was in his mother's womb, he had heard all the stories about Lord Vishnu as Narayanan from Narada, as his mother was staying in Narada's hermitage Thus he became the greatest disciple of all time and became the Lord's greatest devotee as well. Hiranyakasyapu tried to destroy Prahalad's devotion by various methods of torture but with no effect. Prahalad declared that his lord was present everywhere and thus omniscient. Hiranyakasyapu challenged Prahalad to prove himself by demonstrating that the Lord was present in the pillar of the palace. He hit the pillar hard and lo the lord came out in the form of Narasimha, the man-lion form and seized Hiranyakasyapu. Dragging him to the threshold or verandah of the palace, during the dusk he placed him on his lap and used his large nails to tear apart his entails to kill Hiranyakasyapu.

A unique carving by an innovative artesian showing Narashima lying down in a contended state with Lakshmi standing at his feet in anjali hasta and the same panel has Narashima standing and blessing his devotees with the front hands in varada and abhaya mudra. His back hands holding the conch and disc.

I am God still unevolved in human form;

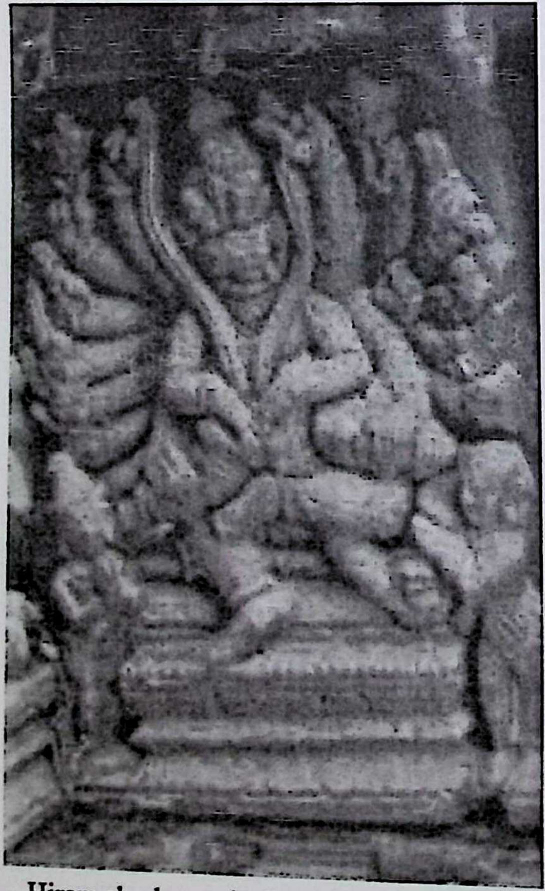


Narashima holding Hiranyakashyapu in a tight grip around his waist and thier legs interlocked in cambat posture.

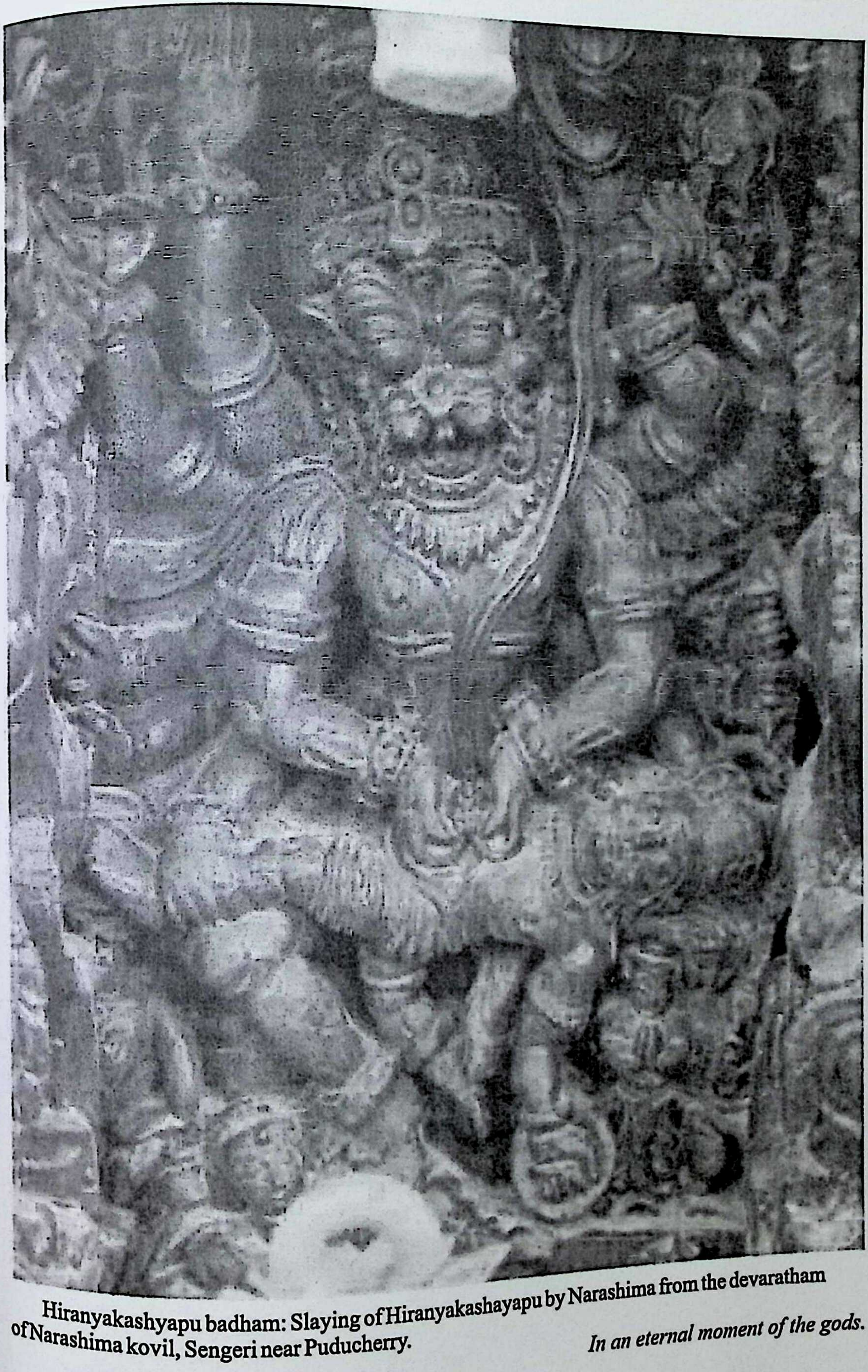
Here on this mutable and ignorant earth.

Thus as per his own wish and the boon granted by Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu took the form which is neither a human nor an animal, during dusk which was neither day or night, placing him on his lap was neither on the ground or in the air, verandah or threshold was neither inside or nor outside the house and nails which was not a weapon. After killing Hiranyakasyapu Vishnu as Narasimha is said to have became peaceful and he quickly sat for meditation also known as the "Yoga-Narasimha". Some say that he was not pacified after killing the demon and Shiva took the form of Samhara-murthi to bring Narasimha under control. Some say Lakshmi came down to pacify the Lord along with his devotee Prahalad. The Narasimha avatar is presented singly on part of the Dasavatar panel. In the devaratham of Narashima Perumal Koil of Sengeri in Abhisekapakkam village a complete panel of the Lord in this Narashima Avatar is beautifully depicted.

The panel includes emergence of Narasimha, breaking of the pillar into two halves, Narasimha fighting Hiranyakasyapu, slaying of Hiranyakasyapu or Hiranyakasyapu vadam, Lakshmi – Narasimha, the Lord with Lakshmi on his side, Yoga Narashima – the Lord in meditation, Veda patha Narasimha – the Lord studying the Vedas. Lord Narasimha appears with a Lion face and looks quit ferocious while emerging out of the pillar and killing of Hiranyakasyapu. He is shown with large eyes, wide open mouth with sharp teeth protruding and hands with large sharp claws of lion. He may have two to twelve hands. While emerging out of the pillar, the pillar appears to be split into two halves from the top with upper part of the Lord seen to be emerging out of the pillar while the lower half is not seen as it appears to be hidden inside the pillar. Here the Lord is also called as Sthuna – Narasimha. Most of the

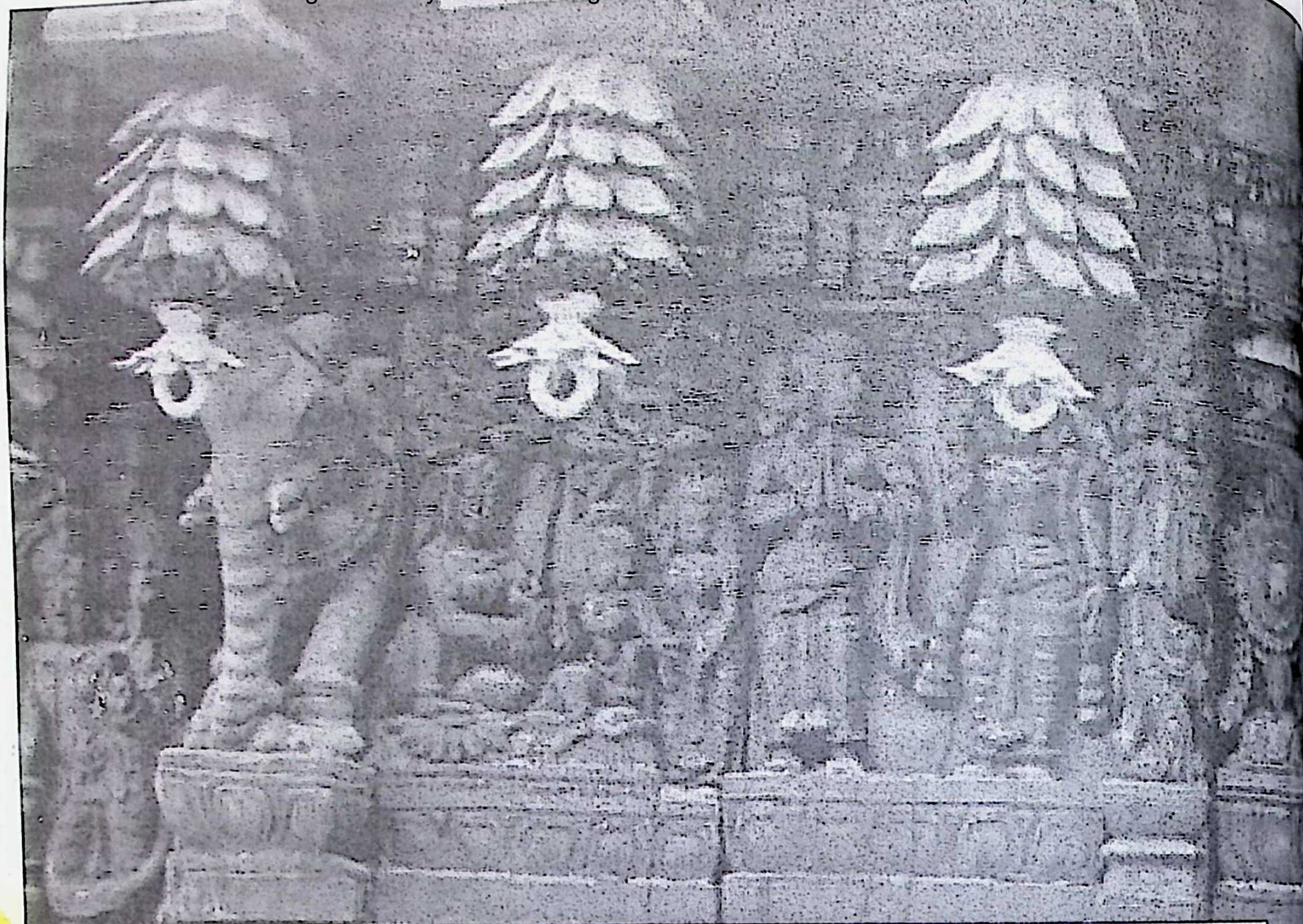


Hiranyakashyapu badham Villianur ratham Pondicherry

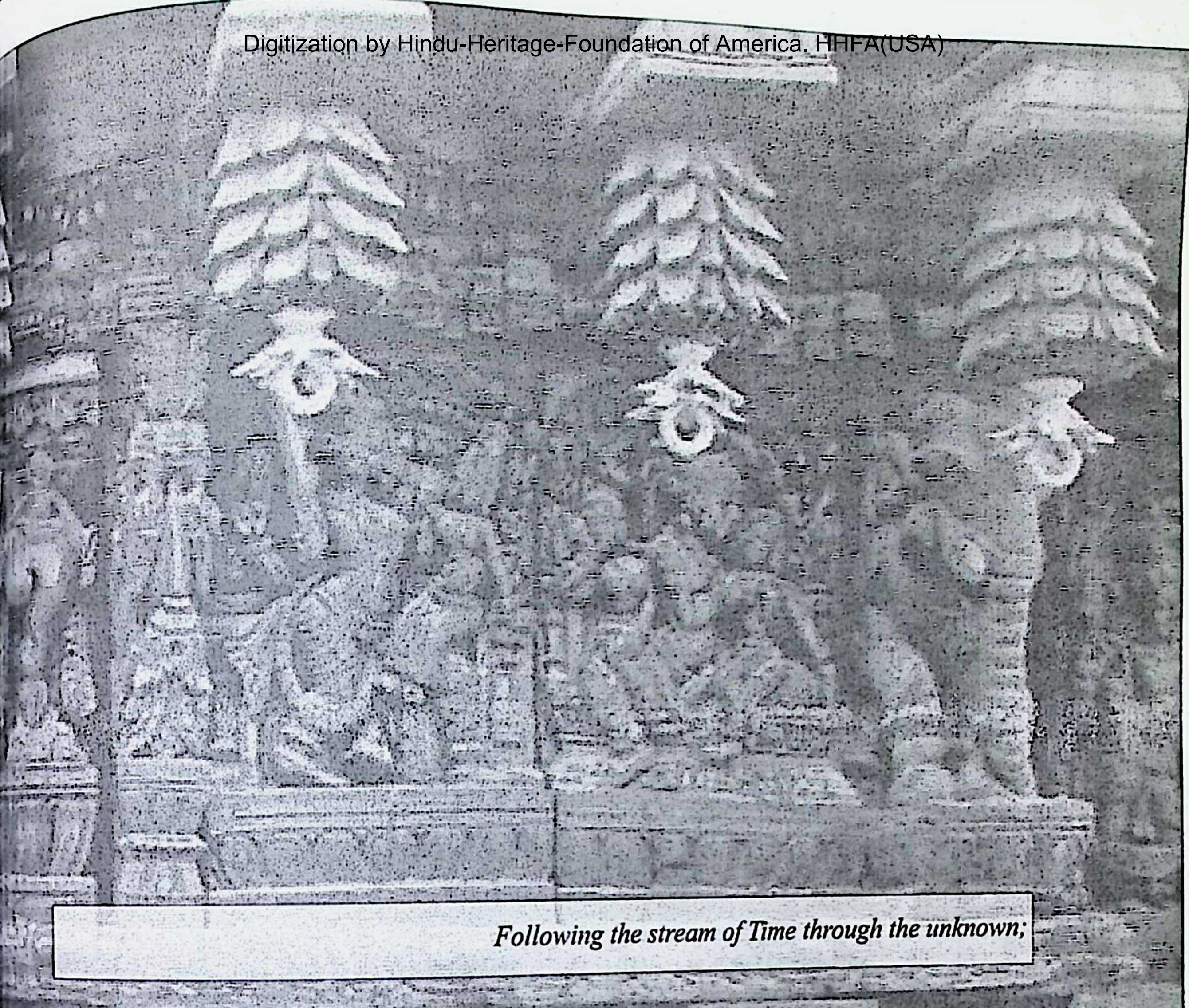


Hiranyakashyapu badham: Slaying of Hiranyakashayapu by Narashima from the devaratham of Narashima kovil, Sengeri near Puducherry.

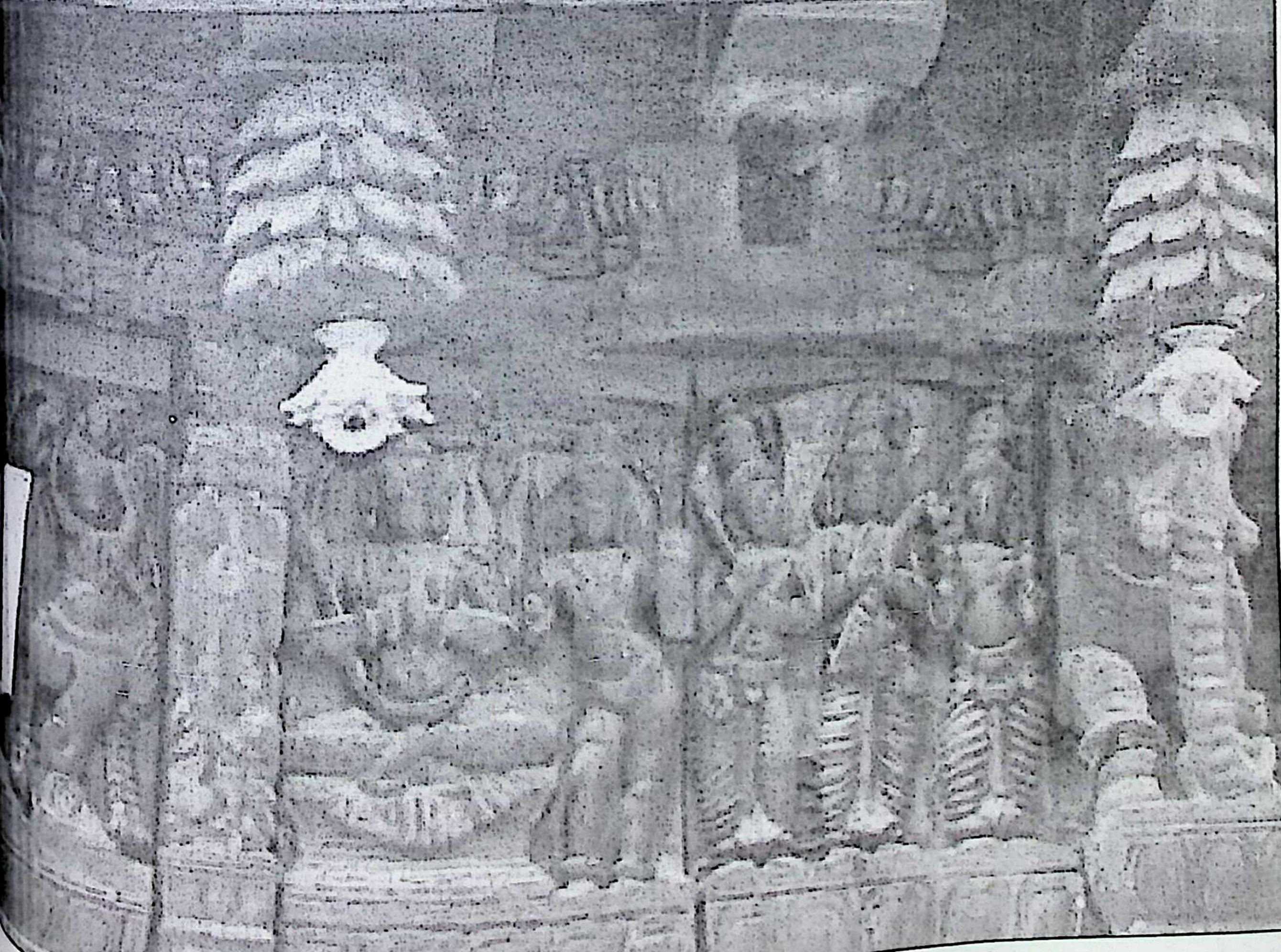
In an eternal moment of the gods.



A panel from the Narashima Koil at Sengeri in Abhisekapakam village near Pondicherry.



Following the stream of Time through the unknown;



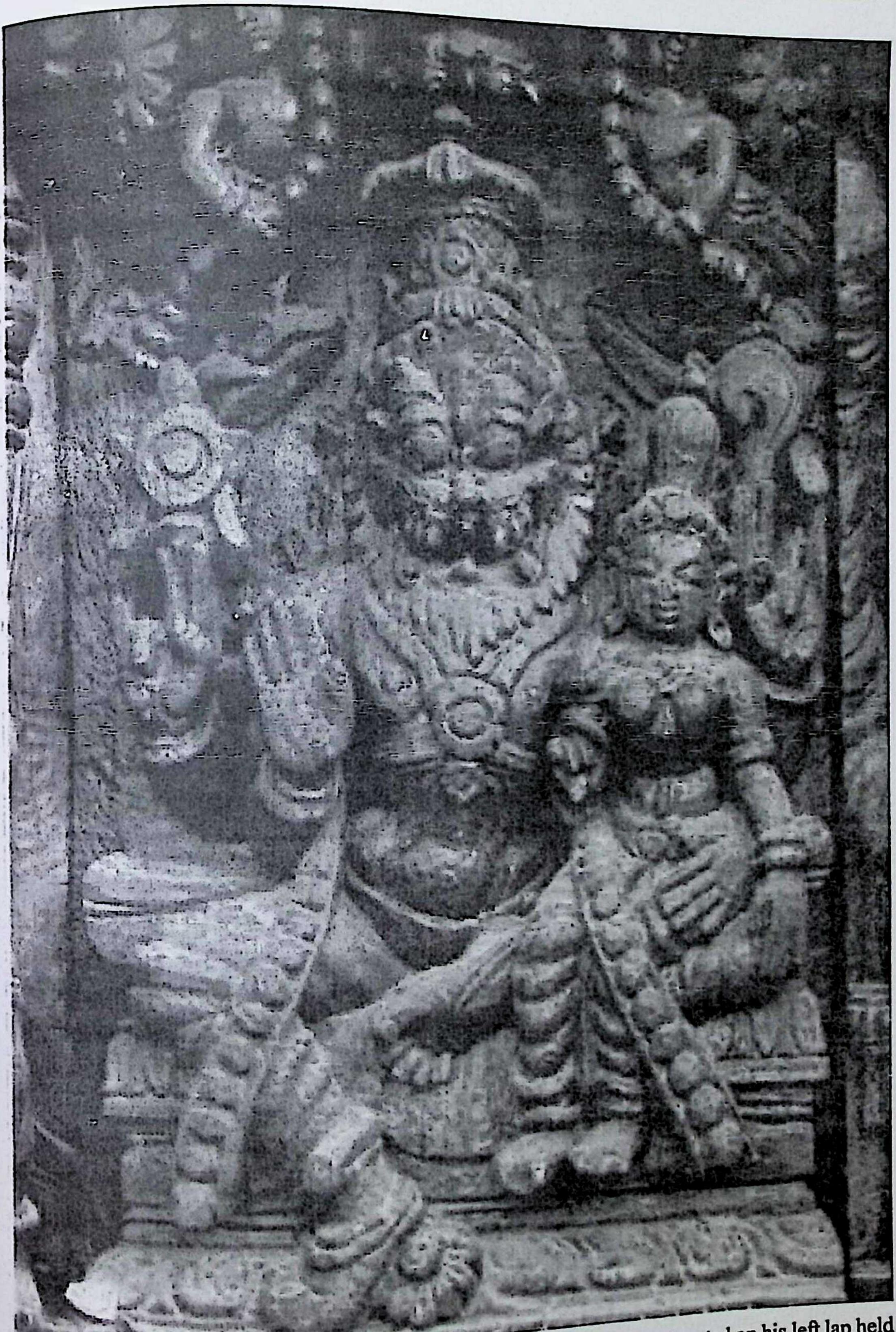
figures of the Lord have four hands, with the back hand holding disc and conch. Here Hiranyakasyapu is seen to kick the pillar with a raised sword ready to strike and a shield in the other hand. Hiranyakasyapu's son Prahalad is seen in almost all the panels as a small boy with folded hands (Anjali hasta) praying to the Lord.

In the second step Hiranyakasyapu is seen to be combating Narashima. The two of them are seen standing and engaged like wrestlers. The popular presentation is that of Hiranya vadham, slaying of the demon king Hiranyakasyapu. Here the lord is seen to be seated on a Bhadrapitha. He is eight handed with two hands buried tearing into the abdomen of Hiranya who is held by the lord on his thighs. Two of the hands are seen to be pulling out the intestines like a garland, two hands holding the head and the legs at two ends to prevent Hiranya from moving and two more hands are seen holding disc and conch. Sometimes Narashima is seen to be seated in Sukhasana with Hiranya on his lap.

Lakshmi Narashimha

It is said that Lord Vishnu in his Narashima Avatar was very ferocious and his anger did not subside down even after slaying the demon king Hiranyakasyapu. The devotee Prahalad prayed to Lakshmi to calm down her beloved, and she descended to the delight of everyone. Here Lakshmi is seen to be seated on the left thigh of Narashima, both being seated on the Simhasana. The Lord in this form is very quiet, calm, and serene with his left arm around Lakshmi. His back hands hold the conch and disc and the right front hand is usually in Abhaya Mudra, he is seen to wear the vanamala, pitambara and kirta mukuta. Flying vidyadharas may also be seen to drop garlands from above, while Prahalad is seen to pray with anjali hasta.

Lakshmi Narashima, Perumal koil, Pondicherry

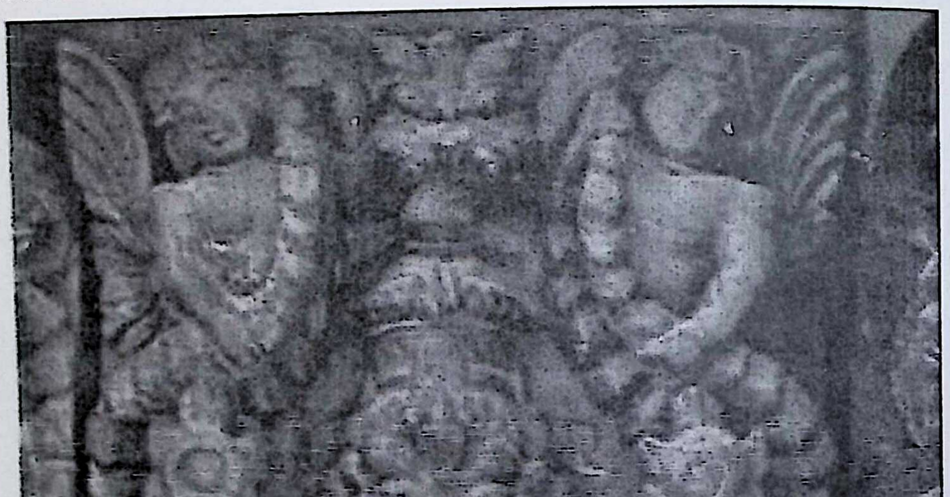


Lakshmi Narashima : Lord Narashima in a smiling face with Lakshmi seated on his left lap held gently and lovingly by the left hand around her waist, the right hand in abhaya mudra.

His soul is her guest, a sovereign mute, inert,

Yoga – Narashimha

The Lord Vishnu in his Yoga Narasimha form is also known as Girija Narasimha. He is lion faced with lower half human, seated comfortably with legs crossed and hands stretched over the knees, and the back hands holding the Conch and Disc. In this image we do not come across Lakshmi, Prahalad or Hiranyakasyapu, hence many refer to the Lord as Kevala – Narasimha (only Narasimha). Some of these may show the Lord to be reading from an open book placed in front and is referred to as Veda–Patha-Narasimha.



Veda patha / Yoga Narashima : Lord Narashima is seen to have serene face, sitting in yogic posture and studying the scriptures.

I break the ignorant pride of human mind

Vamana (Trivikarma)

Vamana Avatar

Carved out of being to prop the works of Time,

Lord Vishnu had to take the form of "Vamana" or the dwarf form to destroy the ego of the grandson of Prahalad – King Bali. King Bali was a demon king (Asura). He had done a lot of tapasya and had received a boon from Sri Lakshmi that she will be ever present to fulfill the wishes of Bali. Bali was a great and just king giving away his wealth to the poor and brahmins. He conducted many pujas and homas. In due course he considered himself to be the greatest giver. He was conducting a puja in which one hundred horses would be sacrificed so that he could become equal to Indra – the king of the heaven. Sri Vishnu took the form of a dwarf brahmachari and appeared before king Bali and asked for alms. Sukracharya was apprehensive as he perceived that this dwarf could be somebody else in disguise and he recognized him as Vishnu. He tried to warn Bali not to promise to give alms. But king Bali did not heed to his advice and took the oath to give him alms. Bali accepted water from the Kamandalu of Vamana. Sukracharya, seeing the danger converted himself to a small fly and blocked the flow of water from the Kamandalu, Vamana plucked a blade of grass and put it to remove the obstacle, only to hear Sukracharya emerging out with bleeding from one of the eyes. Bali made a Sankalpa to give whatever Vamana asked for in alms. Vamana asked for land measuring three steps of his feet. King Bali imagined that the gift asked is too small and insignificant and implored Vamana to ask for something better and bigger as he imagined that three steps of land will be of no use to him. Vamana insisted only that three steps be granted and as soon as Bali granted the same, instantly Vamana grew up to cover the whole universe in the two steps and asked King Bali that there was nowhere to place his third step. Immediately King Bali realized his folly and ignorance and humbly offered his own head for the lord to place his third step. Vishnu placed the third step on Bali's head and pushed him to the "netherworld", to the kingdom of the rakhyasas and demons. Here Vishnu released King Bali and granted him a boon; Bali wished to have the darshan of Vishnu in his "Viswarupa" as well as along with Sri Lakshmi as a couple together. This was granted by the lord. Vishnu in the giant form of covering the worlds by his steps with one leg raised is called as "Trivikarma".

The dwarf form suggests that in the early stage of human race the physical body had not developed well. All further development or growth of consciousness occurs in the human birth. The truth is that our outer senses (eyes, ears, touch and nose) are not able to comprehend the truth and observations made by them are deceptive. The most significant truth is that Lord Vishnu helps destroy the ego of Bali and at the same time is benevolent to his devotee who realised his own ignorance and grants liberation. Lord Vishnu as Vamana is very popular in the Dasavatara panels while as Trivikarma is present independently. The Vamana avatar is about half the size of the other avatars in the panel presentation (about 64 angulas other avatars are 120 angula). As Vamana (described in Vaikhana Sangama) avatar Lord Vishnu is a very beautiful, young brahmachari, with a smiling serene face, holding the umbrella and Kamandalu, wearing a deer hide, bald headed with only a thin lock of hair tied down in "Sikha" (tuff) fashion. Lord Vishnu as Trivikarma is always shown to be much bigger in size with one leg raised up to appear to cover all the worlds - The earth (land) and the heaven (sky) in his two strides. King Bali is always seen in Trivikarma panel in anjali hasta, either standing or bending his neck and offering his head for the Lord to place his third step. Lord Vishnu in his Trivikarma is usually two handed and if he has more than two hands the classic symbols of the lord is present in his hands – conch, disc, mace, and lotus.

Parasurama

Parasurama is the son of sage Jagadamini and Renuka. He is a Brahmin by birth. The parents of Parasurama were killed by the king Kartayajuna, who stole the sacred cow Kamadhenu representing mother earth, in the absence of Parasurama. Parasurama wows to wipe out the entire warrior race of Kashtriyas from the face of the earth. After killing Kartayajuna and all his children. Parasurama continues his terrible war of annihilation of the Kashtriyas for 21 generations. He uses the mighty "Parasu" the axe given by Lord Siva in his war against the warrior race. Lord Vishnu as Parasurama is the one holding the sacred Parasu of Shiva and is usually shown to be standing in the Dasavatara panel with the mighty Parasu in his hand. If he is four handed, the back hands hold the conch and disc or mace and lotus. The Agni Purana describes Parasurama as holding the Parasu (axe), sword, bow and arrow. He is wearing the yagnaparita padma kundala (lotus garland), Hara called indrakanda and a Vadarabandhaa called Vallayavakhyam (as described in Bramhmacharita karma shastra). He wears the kirta Mukuta.

Lord Vishnu as Parasurama is not liberated till the lord is incarnated in the form of Lord Rama. Lord Rama during Sita swayambara breaks the bow of Lord Siva. On breaking of the bow the whole universe is shaken. Parasurama rushed to see who had done it. Parasurama was in deep meditation which was broken by the breaking of the Shiva Dhanu. He comes prepared to cut of the head of whoever had broken Shiva's bow. He challenged Lord Rama for a battle. Rama was forced to mount the arrow on the bow and gets ready to fight.

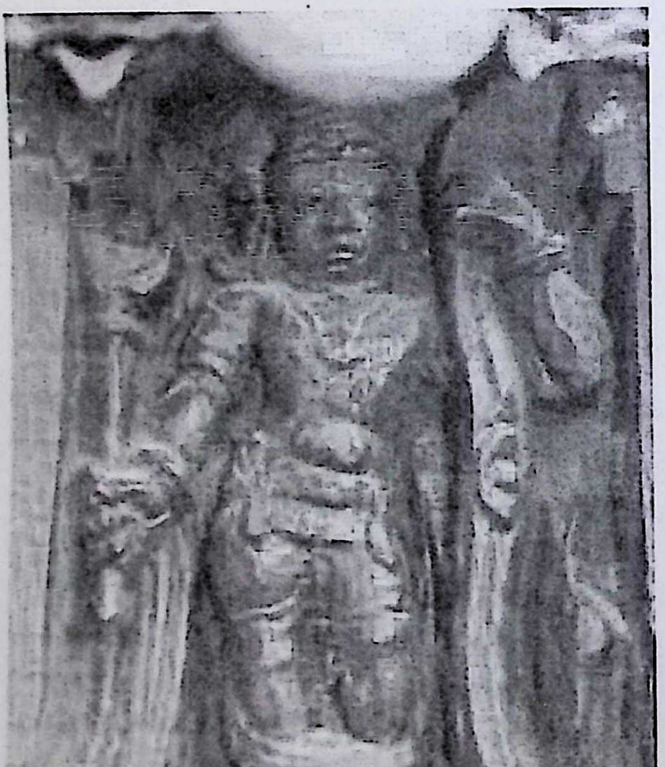
Parasurama Avatar

As earth claims light for its lone separate need

Here Parasurama realised his own folly, but as the arrow was already mounted on the bow it had to be released, as it could not be taken back. Lord Rama humbly asked to Parasurama as to what to do with arrow. Parasurama asked Sri Rama to release it in the south direction and destroy his (Parasurama's) ego and Ahankara. Sri Rama does so and Parasurama is released from his karma and his soul merged with the Divine (Lord Vishnu). It is interesting to observe that both Rama and Parasurama are the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Parasurama is the stage of growth of consciousness of human to learn the use of metals at the physical level and the consciousness has just emerged from the animal to man with quality of asuric (animal) in him.

Rama Avatar

Sri Rama is the seventh avatar of lord Vishnu. He is considered as the epitome of dharma and rightfully called as Maryada Purusotama. He is the hero of the epic Ramayana. Any attempt to give a brief description of the Divine in the human form of Sri Rama is futile. The divine guardians of Vaikuntha Jai and Vijaya were cursed to be born in the world of ignorance (earth) three times for having denied entry into the abode of Vishnu to the saint brothers' Sanata kumara. They will be released from this curse each time by Vishnu taking avatar. So Jai and Vijaya are born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna to be released by Vishnu as Sri Rama. Ravana was a learned man with great devotion to Shiva and was also aware of his true self, he knew that



Rama Avatar
Heights for their human stature too remote

the quickest route to salvation was to kidnap Laxmi in the form of Sita and thus bringing forward Sri Rama (Vishnu) as quickly as possible and being released by him. Sri Rama sets out the rules of ethics and morality in his life time. As man's consciousness moves forward from animal to man and slowly towards the divine it reaches the stage of morality and ethics during the lifetime of Sri Rama. In the later part man's consciousness move more forwards towards spiritual state during the lifetime of Sri Krishna. Man is moving on towards the Divine consciousness and beyond the mind. It is said that Sri Rama along with Sita, Laxmanan, Hanuman, Sugriva, Jambavan and others returned to Ayodhya by an aerial Vimana or flying ratham called Puspak Vimana. This originally belonged to the devatas and was captured by Ravana during his war with Indra.

Balarama

Balarama is not considered as an avatar by many and hence may not be present in the Dasavatara panel. He is also the elder brother Sri Krishna, who forms the complete incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Balarama is always seen to carry the plough and pestle. He may also carry the club (gada) and thunderbolt if he is presented with four hands. He wears the kirta mukuta, makara kundala and trivastra mark on his chest. His spouse is called as Revati Devi. He is shown along with Krishna in many places and hence is described accordingly.

Balarama Avatar

Beyond the phantom beauty of this world;

Sri Krishna Avatar
The soul saw beyond heaven's limiting boundaries,

Sri Krishna

Sri Krishna is the hero of the epic Mahabharata as well as the author of another epic „The Gita ". Sri Krishna is considered as the complete avatar of Lord Vishnu. Hence to attempt to describe Lord Vishnu in his Krishna avatar is very difficult; Sri Krishna in this avatar indicates that he is the Lord incarnate right from his birth. He clearly indicates that he is conscious of being the Divine. This brings the possibility of the growth of consciousness in human so that he is able to recognize the presence of the divine in himself and has the distinct and definite possibility to realize and merge with the divine as mentioned earlier. The multitude contradictions, dualities that present to man at all the level of consciousness like the physical, vital, mental etc. are resolved by the Lord. This he does by his Gita Upadesa to his beloved friend and sakha - Arjuna. Some of the events of Sri Krishna "s life are described in the next chapter. He is always present in all the types of rathams like Shiva, Amman, Vinayaga etc. He is present as a part of the Dasavatara panel or independently. Many popular presentations are Venugopal, Radha and Krishna, Damodara, Bakasura vadham, Sakatasura vadham, Putana vadham, Kaliya Damana, Govardhana giridhari, Gopi-Vastra-paharana, Parthasarathi, Viswarupa and Viratrupa are a few to mention.

> "God is a great and cruel Torturer because He loves. You do not understand this, because you have not seen and played with Krishna."
>
> -Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aphorisms

What does "to play with Krishna" mean? What does "God is a great and cruel Torturer" mean?

KRISHNA is the immanent Divine, the Divine Presence in everyone and in all things. He is also, sovereingnly, the aspect of Delight and Love of the Supreme; he is the smiling tenderness and the playful gaiety; he is at once the player, the play and all his playmates. And as both the game and is its results are wholly known, conceived, willed, organised and played consciously in their entirety, there can be room for nothing but the delight of the play. Thus to see Krishna means to find the inner Godhead, to play with Krishna means to be identified with the inner Godhead and to share in his consciousness. When you achieve this state, you enter immediately into the bliss of the divine play; and the more complete the identification, the more perfect the state.

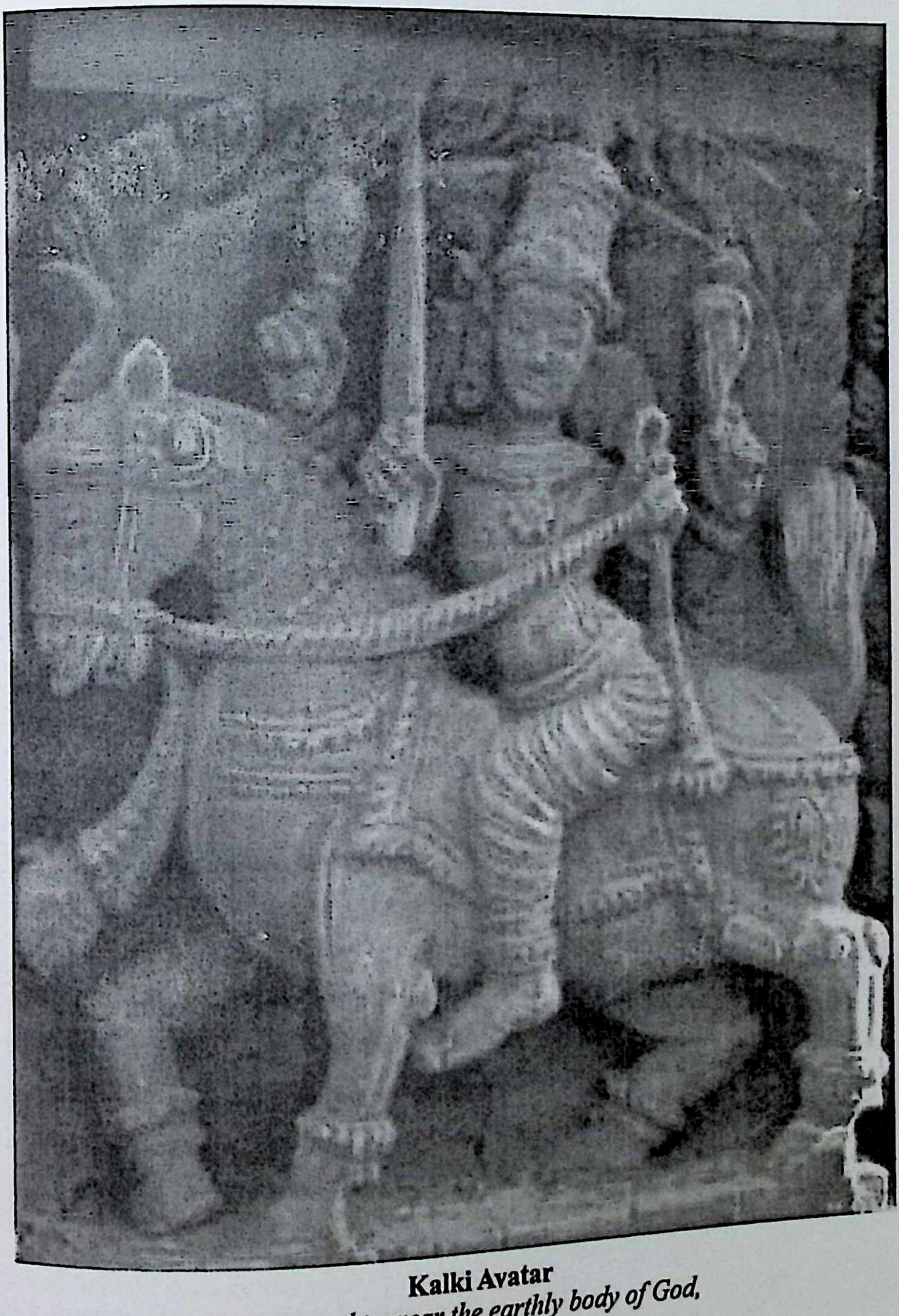
But if some corner of the consciousness keeps the ordinary perception, the ordinary understanding, the ordinary sensation, then you see the suffering of others, you find the play that causes so much suffering very cruel and you conclude that the God who takes pleasure in such a play must be a terrible Torturer; but on the other hand, when you have had the experience of identification with the Divine, you cannot forget the immense, the wonderful love which he puts into his play, and you understand that it is the limitation of our vision that makes us judge in this way, and that far from being a voluntary Torturer, he is the great beneficent love that guides the world and men, by the quickest routes, in their progressive march towards perfection, a perfection which, moreover, is always relative and is always being surpassed.

But a day will come when this apparent suffering will no longer be required to stimulate the advance and when progress can be made more and more in harmony and delight.

The Mother
6th April 1960

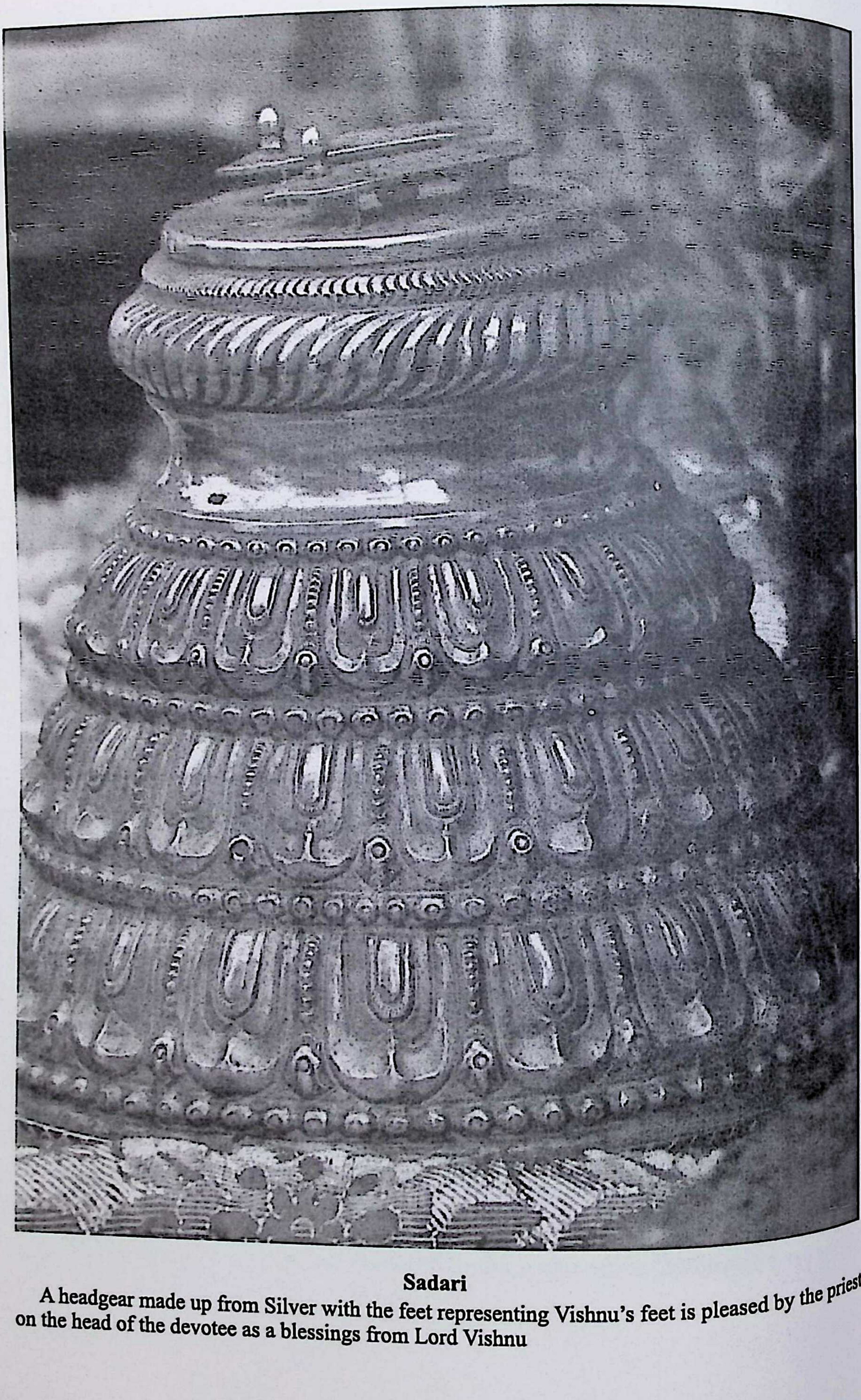
Kalki

It is predicted that lord Vishnu will come down to earth from his abode of Vaikuntha in the form of Kalki Avatar as the tenth incarnation. We are in the Kali yuga now, the age of darkness and there will be gradual and steady fall of Dharma. A whole lot of upa-purana has been written in Sanskrit describing the circumstances of the appearance of this avatar and what will happen at that time. It is predicted that in this kali yuga there will be the rule of the dark forces. The influence of these demonic forces will go on increasing and reach a peak and life will become miserable for the pious people, saints, rishis and devotees and devatas. They all approach Vishnu to protect them from these asuric forces and he consents to descend to Prithvi and take a avatar as Kalki. It is well described in the Bhagavatam in the 12th canto as well as in great detail in the Bramananda Purana. It is said that Kalki avatar of Vishnu will be born to a learned Brahmin called Vishnuyaksa from the village Sambhala. He will appear to be riding a white horse with a blazing golden sword destroying all asuric and demonic forces. He will reestablish dharma and bring the end of the kali Yuga and that will be the beginning of the Satya yuga, the establishment of truth consciousness. This will be the start of peace, happiness, beauty, compassion among all the living beings on earth. Everyone will be in truth consciousness and blissful state, true sat chit Ananda. Hence the artist usually presents Kalki avatar as a man riding a horse with sword raised in the right hand, sometimes the back hands will have the insignia of Lord Vishnu.



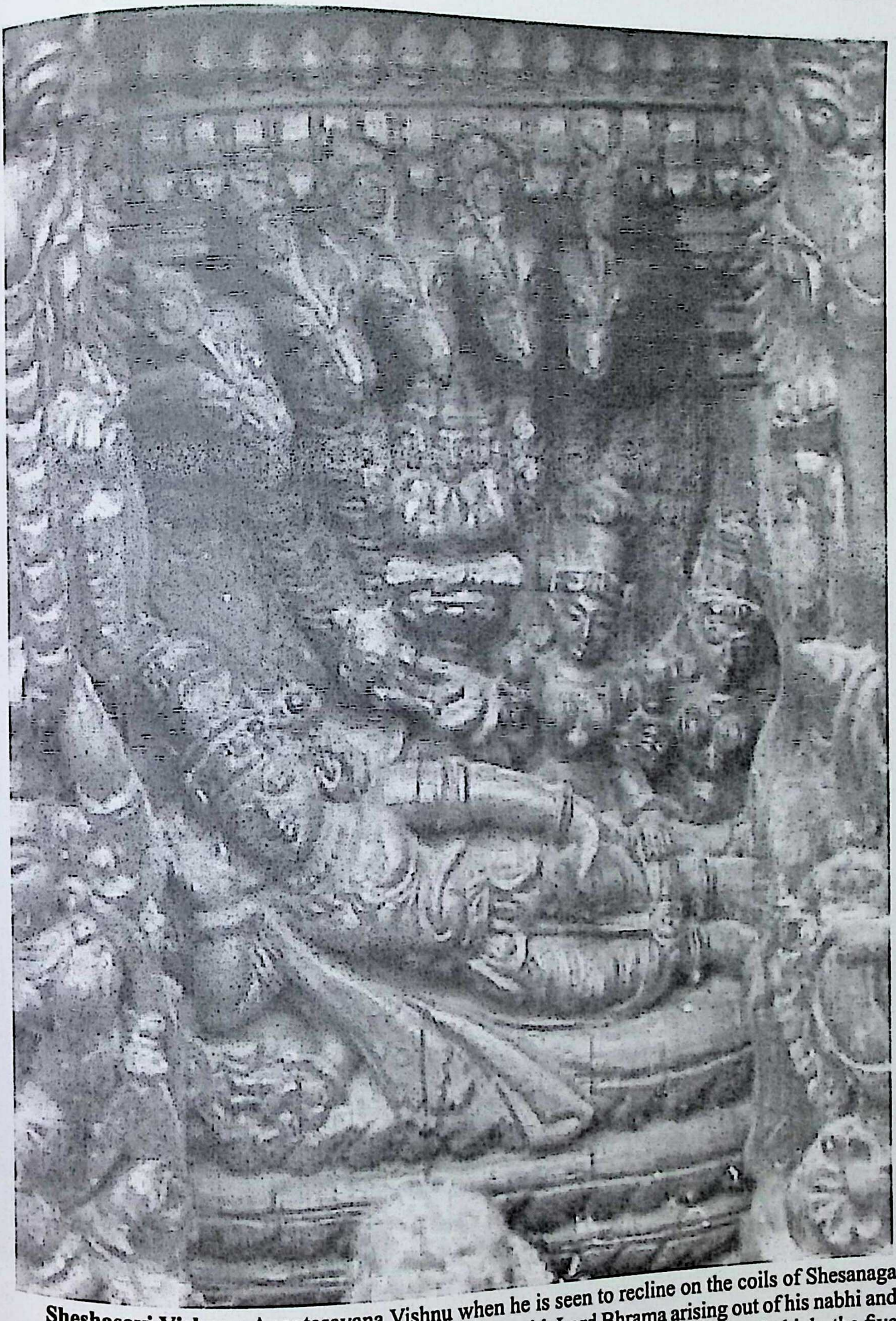
Kalki Avatar

Equipped to wear the earthly body of God,



Sadari

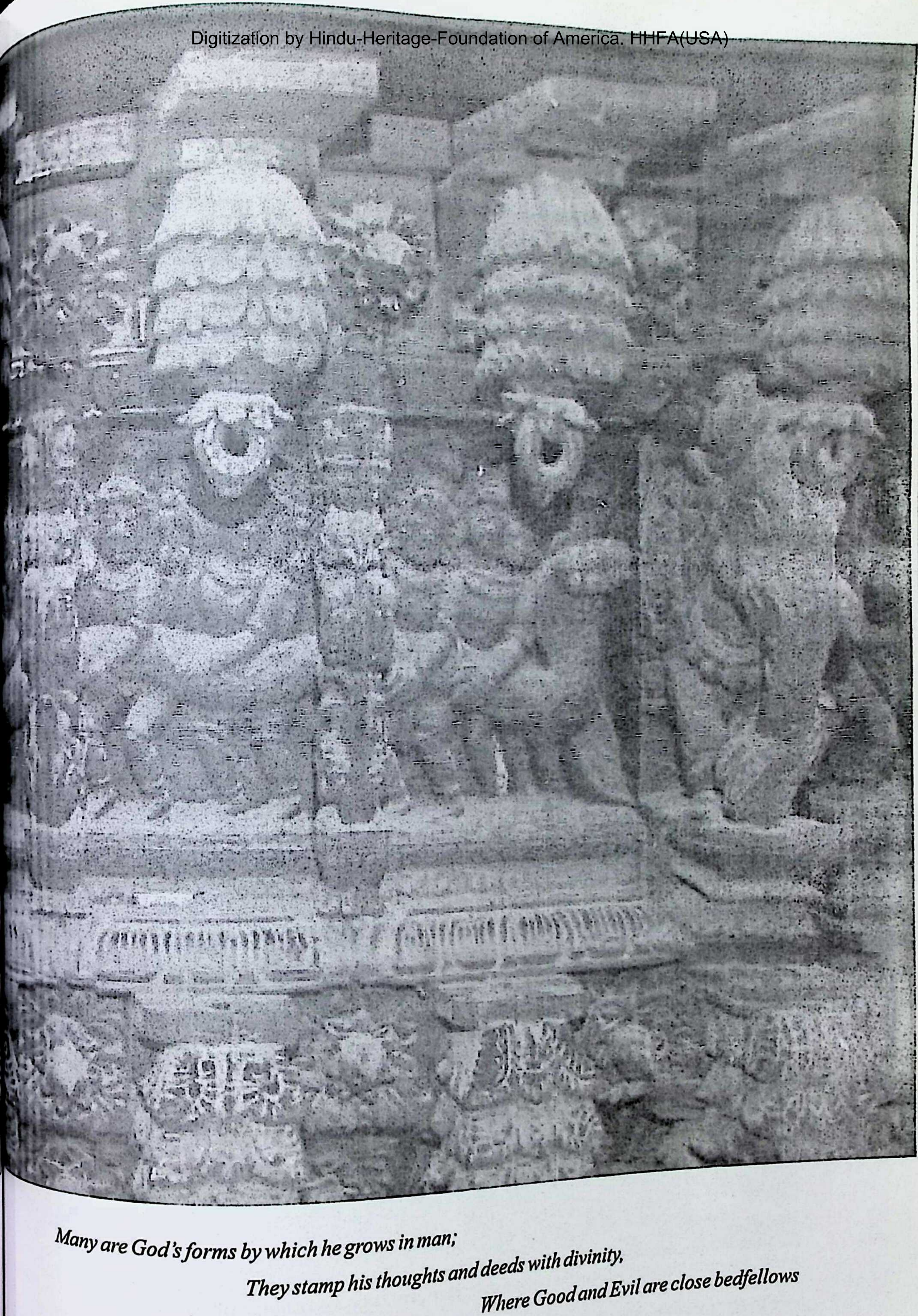
A headgear made up from Silver with the feet representing Vishnu's feet is pleased by the priest on the head of the devotee as a blessings from Lord Vishnu



Sheshasayi Vishnu : Anantasayana Vishnu when he is seen to recline on the coils of Shesanaga floating on the ocean of milk in endless time and space, with Lord Bhrama arising out of his nabhi and Bhoodevi and Sridevi seen gently massaging his feet, his left hand placed on his left thigh, the five hoods of Sehshanaga always ready and alert to obey his master.

But the Word of Life is hidden in its script, He dreams of her beauty made for ever his,

The Samudra Manthana A wonderfully carved panel showing the churning of the ocean of milk by the demons on one side and the gods on the other side. Adhishesha naga is used as the rope and the mountain Meru as the pestle with lord Vishnu himself in the form of Kashyapa floating supports mount Meru, he is seen to support the gods as Narshima , the face of Shesha naga is on the right towards the asuras, tail towards the devas and in the centre Lakshmi is seen to emerge out with two lotuses on her back hands .

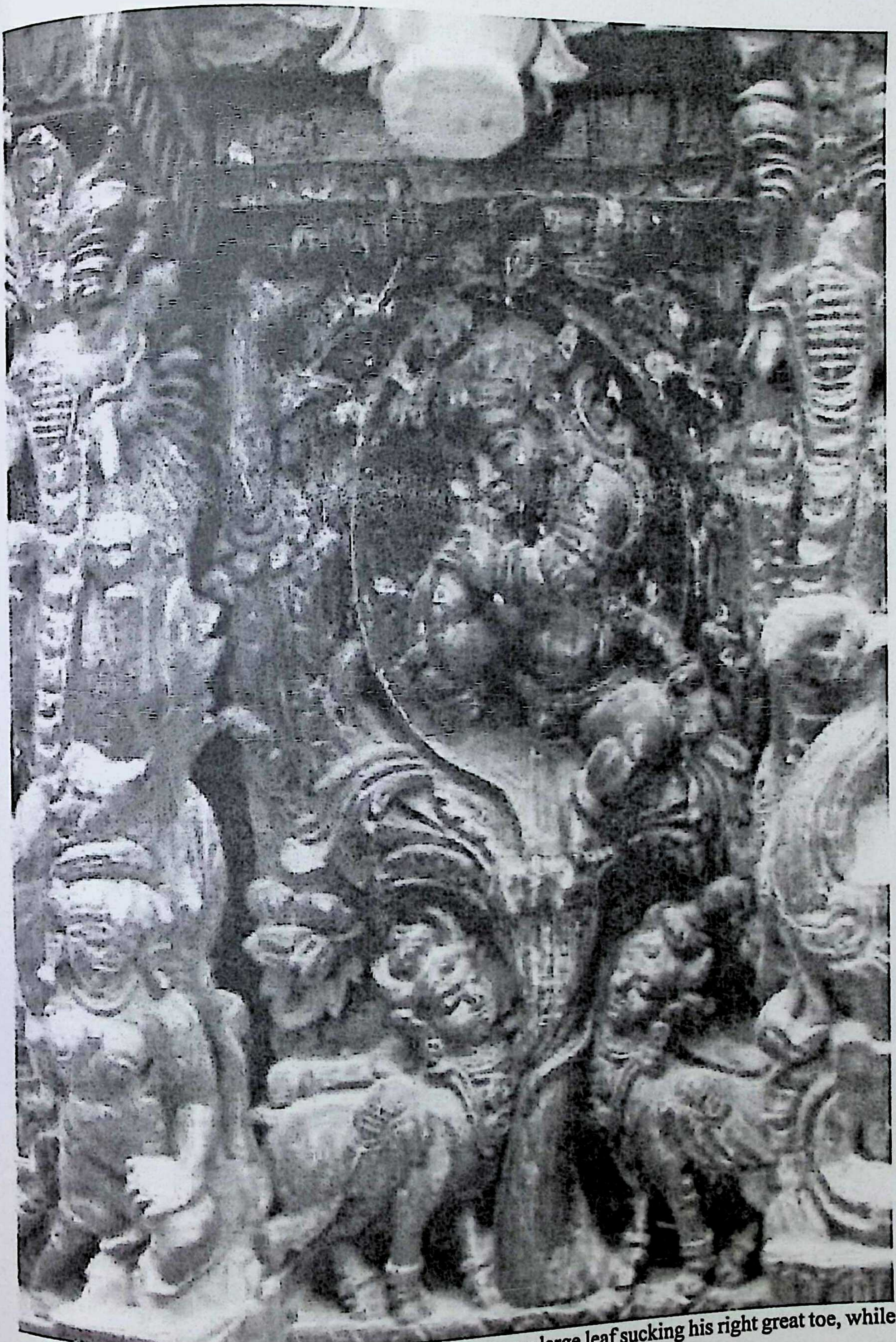


Many are God's forms by which he grows in man;
They stamp his thoughts and deeds with divinity,
Where Good and Evil are close bedfellows

कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा बुद्ध्यात्मना वा प्रकृतेस्स्वभावात्।
करोमि यद्यत्सकलं परस्मै नारायणयेति समर्पयामि॥

kāyena vācā manasendriyairvā buddhyātmanā vā prakṛtessvabhāvāt|
karomi yadyatsakalaṃ parasmai nārāyanayeti
samarpayāmi||Śrīmadbhāgavata (11.2.36)

Whatever I do with the Body, Speech, Mind or the Sense Organs,either by discrimination of the intellect or by the deeper feelings of the Heart or by the existing tendencies of the Mind I Do them All (i.e. Whatever work is to be done) without ownership, and I surrender them at the feet of Sri Narayana.



Batapatrasayi: Sri Krishna on a pepal tree, lying on a large leaf sucking his right great toe, while two Kamadhenu on either side of the tree.

All struggle was turned to a sweet strife of love

Chapter - X

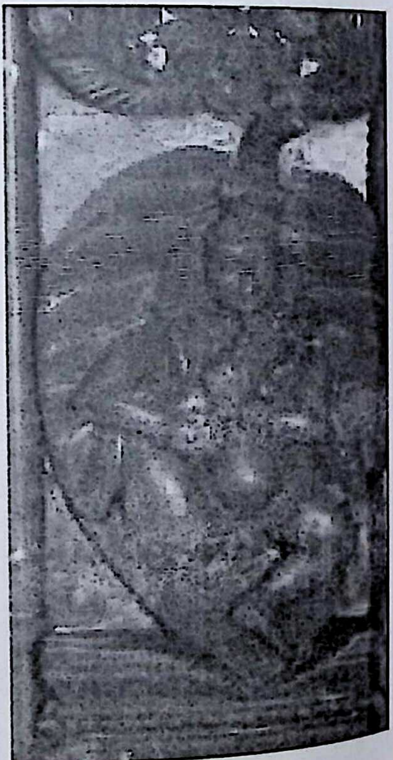
Vishnu – His other forms

Batapatrasayi

Sri Krishna is seen as a new born child floating on the pepal leaf in a relaxed manner shaking the left big toe. Bata Patra Sayi literarily means Bata (pepal) Patra (Leaf) Sayi (lying down). He is also called as Sriyatipati and Narayana, the one reclining on the cosmic ocean. He is apparently in conversation with Markandya the eternal youthful sage.

Birth of Krishna

Krishna was born to Vasudeva and Devaki as the eighth son in the prison of King Kansha. As soon as Krishna was born there was the deafening thunder storm, lightning, rain and everything was in darkness. Devaki herself was unconscious, all the guards had fallen asleep Krishna directs Vasudeva to take him to Nanda's palace on a small basket. On reaching the banks of the river Yamuna, it gives way for the Lord to cross it. And during the torrential rain, Seshanaga appears to protect the baby from rain and thunder. Vasudeva leaves baby Krishna with Yasoda and brings back the girl child born to Yasoda. After reaching the prison the guards wake up hearing the cries of the baby girl. King Kansha reaches the prison and snatches the new born baby. Devaki pleads with her brother to leave the girl child alone as it is destined that only the eighth son will be his slayer. King Kansha does not listen and without hesitation tries to crush the new born girl, only to see the child slip away from his hands and fly to the sky like a Devi. She is Yogamaya and she foretells Kansha that the eighth child of Devaki is already born, safe and is destined to slay Kansha. Some say that the girl is not Yogamaya but Kali who appears to proclaim the Bhavisya Vani.



Vishnu as Batapatrasayii:

Vishnu is seen to to lying on gaint pepal leave floating on the cosmic ocean, holding his right leg up with both hands and sucking the great toe. He is wearing the kritamukuta, necklace, other ornaments in the hands, legs, ears, around the waist; from the Perumal koil Puducherry.

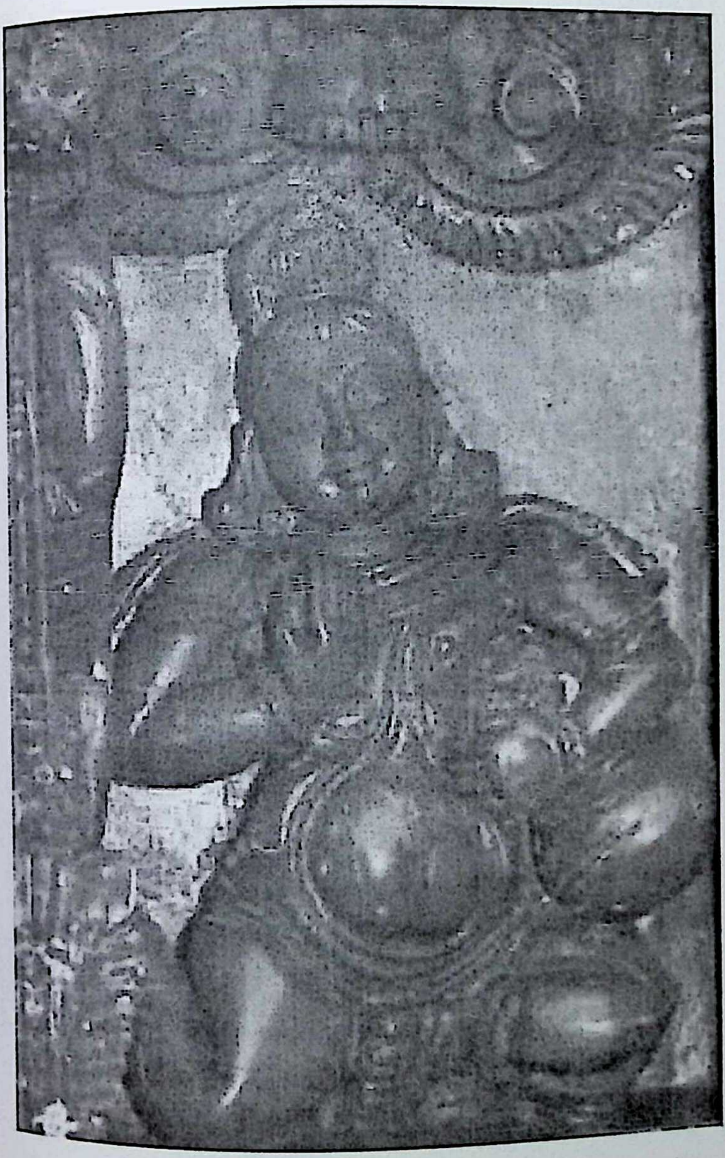
Naked, unwalled, unterrified it bore

Santana Gopala

Krishna as a new born baby is being fed by queen Yasoda and is called as Santana Gopala. Yasoda is very beautiful and wears clothes and ornaments that befits a queen, but her simplicity is observed as she is seen placing baby Krishna on her lap, feeding him from her breast, smiling with peace and happiness.

Makhana Chor

Sri Krishna along with his friends is seen stealing butter and eating it fondly. It is a very common presentation in temple cars. Krishna is seen to climb up a human pyramid made by his friends to steal the butter, at some places he is seen eating butter and some at places he is seen playing pranks with the gopis. In some places Sri Krishna is shown to have been caught by the gopis stealing the butter. In some panels gopis are seen to complain to Yasoda that her naughty son Krishna is stealing butter. Sri Krishna as a child kills many of the Rakshaha and demons sent by King Kansha. These asuras take many forms in an attempt to kill Krishna, each of these forms a story. Many of these stories are presented in the temple cars.

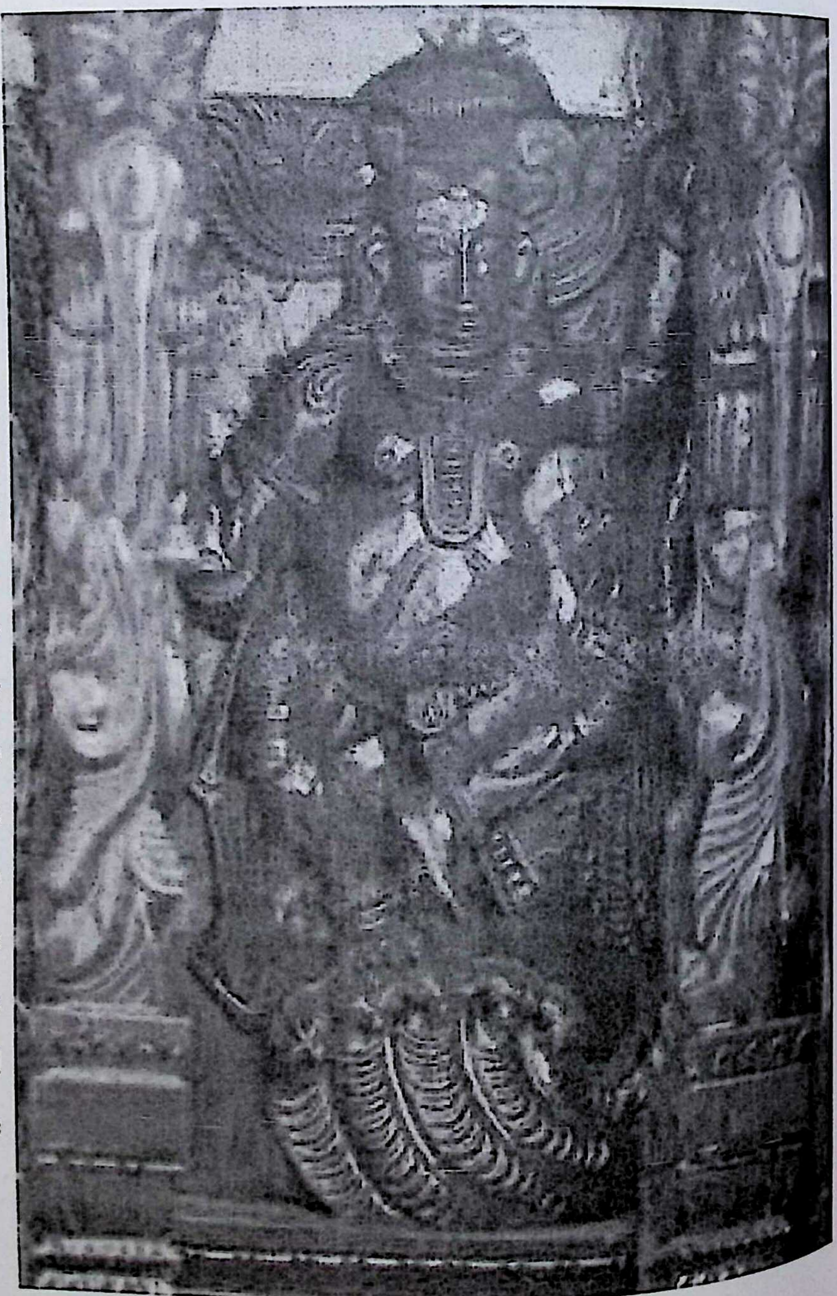


Navaneeta Krishna: Makhan chor, krishna stealing butter and enjoying eating it.

Pure and untouched above this mortal play

Kaliya Damana

Kaliya is a snake demon which lives in the depth of river Yamuna. The snake was poisoning the river at a particular place and no animal could survive on drinking that water. Sri Krishna while playing a game of ball with his friends deliberately allows (throws) the ball to fall in the Yamuna. As everyone is scared to recover it, Sri Krishna dives to the depth of the river. He enacts the fierce dance on the hood of Kaliya to tame him. The consorts of Kaliya pray to Krishna to spare their husband's life, to which Krishna consents on the condition that Kaliya leave the Yamuna and live elsewhere without killing innocent animals. Sri Krishna is seen to dance on the hood of Kaliya in classic tribhanga posture holding the tail of the snake in his back left hand, the front two hands playing the flute. The right back hand is seen holding the conch or disc or in Abhaya mudra or as Gaja hasta. Usually Kaliya is seen to have five hoods with fear in its face and its two consorts – naga kanyas praying in anjali hasta to Sri Krishna to spare his life. The naga kanyas have half woman's and half snake's body with the hood of a snake.



Putana Badham

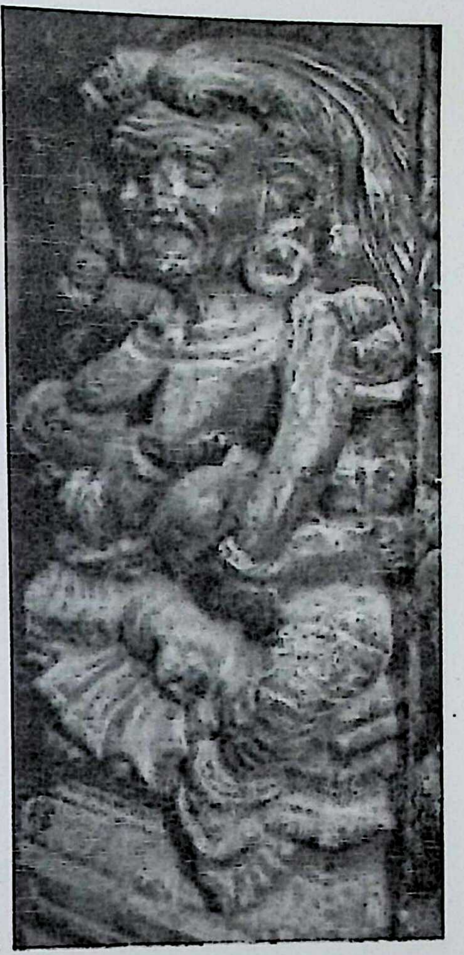
Putana was a demon sent by Kamsa to feed poison mixed in her milk to kill Krishna. Putana took the form of a beautiful maid and begs to feed Krishna. On getting permission from Yasoda she placed Krishna in her lap and feeds milk from her breast. As Krishna sucks the milk along with that he sucks the life of Putana. Putana resumes the body of that of a demon before dying. In the temple rathams she appears to be very terrible faced, long breasted, with Krishna laying in her lap sucking her nipple and with the other hand pinching the other breast.

Bakasura and Sakatasura Vadham

It is the asura in the form of a bird. Krishna pulls the beaks of the bird apart to tear up the asura and kill it. The asura in the shape of a wheel of the cart which Krishna shatters during his play and thus kills Sakatasura. Other asuras to be killed by Krishna in his childhood include Kharasura, Kesin, Vtasura and Ugrasura. In most places Sri Krishna is seen to be wearing minimum clothes but is decked in a variety of ornaments on his neck, waist, hand, leg and ears.

Release of the Sons of Kubera

Once during Narada's visit to kingdom of Kubera, the sons Nalakubera and Manigriva were completely drunk and did not show due respect to Narada. Narada cursed them saying that they would be born on earth as Arjuna trees. As Arjuna trees they had to wait for centuries for the birth of Vishnu as Sri



Sri Krishna and Putana:

Sri Krishna sucking the breast and the life of the demoness Putana send to kill him, the pain on the face of the demoness is well depicted by the artist. Putana was the daughter of King Valli in her previous birth during Vishnu's Vamana avatar, she had seen Vamana aproaching the Yagna and wondered if she could have a beautiful child like vamana so she could feed him holding in her lap, the lord was generous and said be it, then she saw Vamana taking the form of Trivikarma and push her father king Valli to the neigther world and got angry and wanted to kill Vamana by poisioning through her breast milk, the lord granted it and said be it. Thus as Putana feeds Krishna and tries to poision him, but is granted moksha by the lord and accepted in Vaikuntha as she becomes his mother on earth.

There no beginning is and there no end

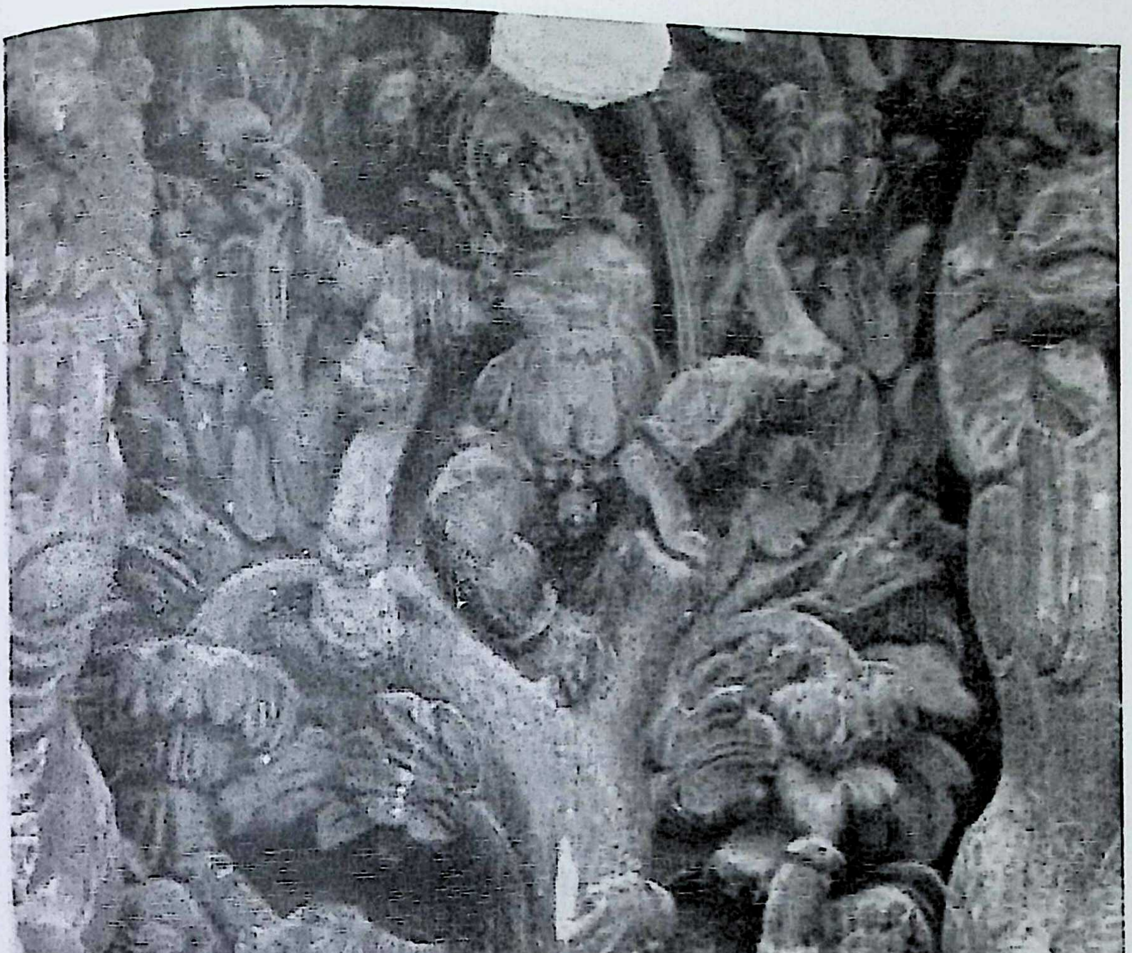
Krishna to redeem them. Yasoda binds Sri Krishna to a drum as a punishment for stealing butter from the gopis. Sri Krishna pulls the drum and goes to the courtyard and engages the drum gets entangled between the two Arjuna trees. Sri Krishna pulled hard on the drum to bring down the trees and thus releasing the sons of Kubera. Both of sons of Kubera are seen to pray to Sri Krishna in anjali hasta for redeeming them from the curse.

Krishna as Damodara: Krishna pulling the drum to which he was tied by Josoda as a punishment for stealing butter from the gopies. Here he is seen to uproot the two arjuna trees in the courtyard and granting moksha to the celestial beings.

All life a song of many meeting lives;

Gavardhanadhari

The people of Gokula loved Sri Krishna very much and started to go to him for all their problems. Gradually the people of Gokula stopped worshipping Lord Indra. This angered Lord Indra and without realizing that lord Vishnu himself had taken avatara of Sri Krishna, he showers torrential rain and thunder on Gokula. Sri Krishna is not worried at all and lifts the Govardhana Mountain with the tip of the little finger and holds it high and gathers all the living creatures of Gokula under it. So Sri Krishna is surrounded by cows, cowherds, men, women



Gopi vasthrapharana: Sri Krishna stealing the clothes of the gopies in the Yamuna river bank and daring them to come out to him to collect the clothes. The gopies praying to him to hand over the clothes so that they can cover themselves. It is only Sri Radha who comes out boldly, she says that she already belongs to Sri Krishna having surrendered to him completely in every aspect (body, mind and soul), where is the worry for the dress which merely covers the body.

Mind's climbing brilliant thoughts, the spirit's bliss;

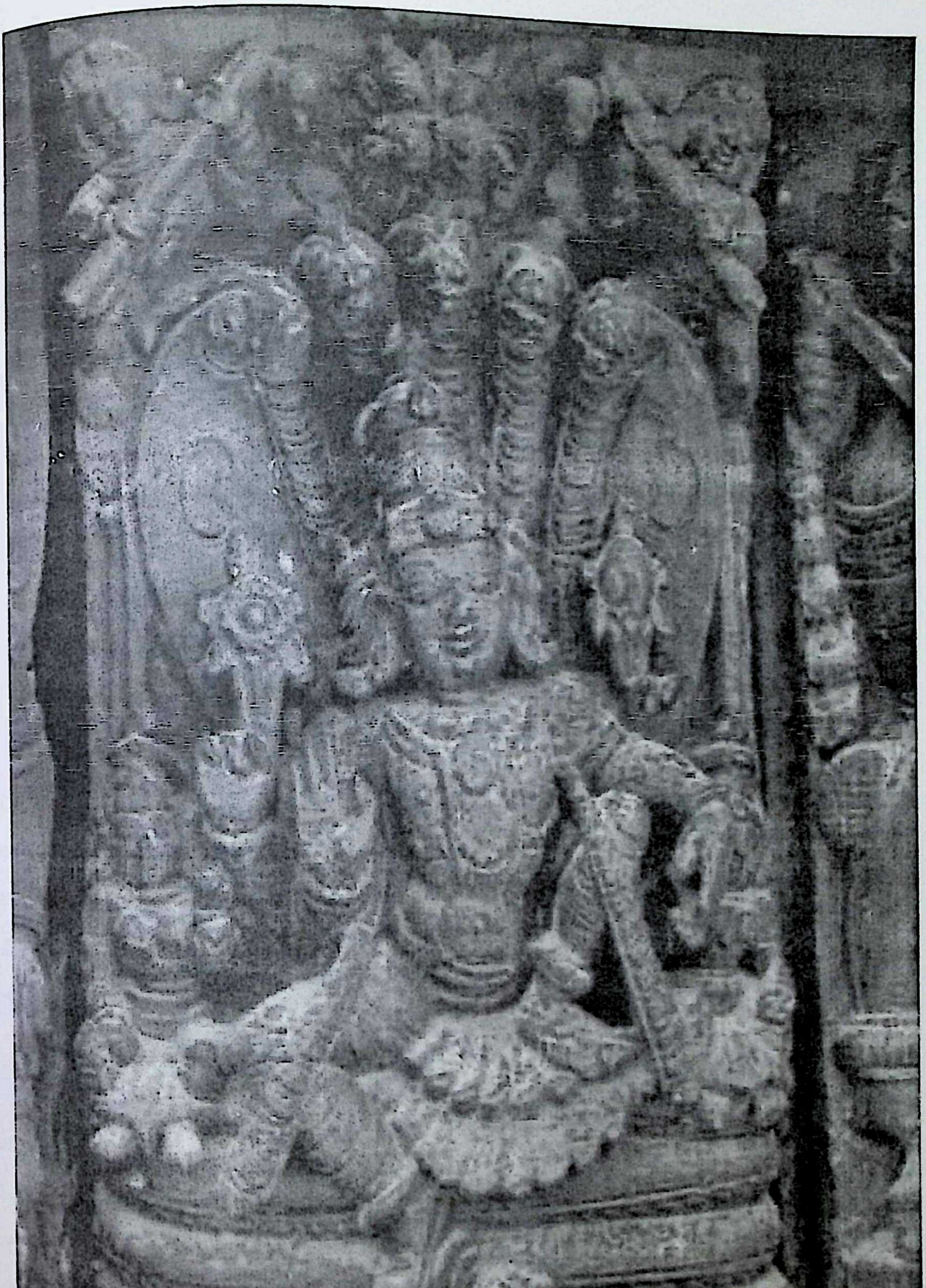
and children.

Venugopal

Sri Krishna as Venugopal is seen to play the Venu or flute. He is also called as Muralidhara, the one holding the murali. He is usually standing under a tree in classic tribhanga posture, with the left leg firmly placed and the right leg slightly bend with thetoe touching the ground, the torso bent to the opposite side and the neck to the same side forming the third bend. He is seen to be very serene, smilingly playing the flute. The music coming out of the lord's flute has inspired poets down the ages to write poems and to compose music. It forms the essence and source of love. The gopis, gopikas, cows, cowherds all leave their work on hearing the sweet music being played on the flute by lord Vishnu in the form of Sri Krishna as Venugopal. Sometimes the lord is seen with two more back hands holding the disc and conch. Sri Krishna as Venugopal also wears the Kiritamukuta and Pitambara.

Gopi-Vastra-paharana

Sri Krishna used to play pranks with the gopis. He was equally loved by all the gopis even though he used to trouble them by his naughty pranks. He used to break the pots of water which they used to carry. He used to steal their milk; he used to give the milk to the calves, all these forms the Krishna-Lila. In this episode Sri Krishna steals the garments of the gopis and hides them up on the tree while the gopis were taking bath in the water. He draws their attention by playing the flute atop the tree. The gopis are seen to be inside the water begging Sri Krishna to give back their dresses. Sri Krishna dares the gopis to come out and collect it from him; it is only Sri Radha who comes out without any hesitation to Sri Krishna. Sri Radha says that as she fully belongs to Sri Krishna there is no need to have any shyness to go to him with or without clothes. Sri Radha forms the epitome of complete and true surrender to the lord. This also is the basis of true love, one has to give oneself completely with no hesitancy to the lord. In every incidence right from childhood till the end, Lord Krishna tries to teach humans the various paths leading to the lord. The clothes only cover the body. The soul of the individual is clothed by the physical body, vital and mental aspects of that person. One need to discard all these without hesitation to discover one's own soul and also realize at that time that the soul is but a spark of the greater Soul, the Divine or the Lord himself. Sri Krishna being the lord is



Sheshasayi Vishnu : Here Vishnu is seated on the coils of Anatashesha snake with Bhoodevi and Sridevi on either sides and the five hoods of the snake forming the backdrop.

A tie between them still could bridge two worlds;

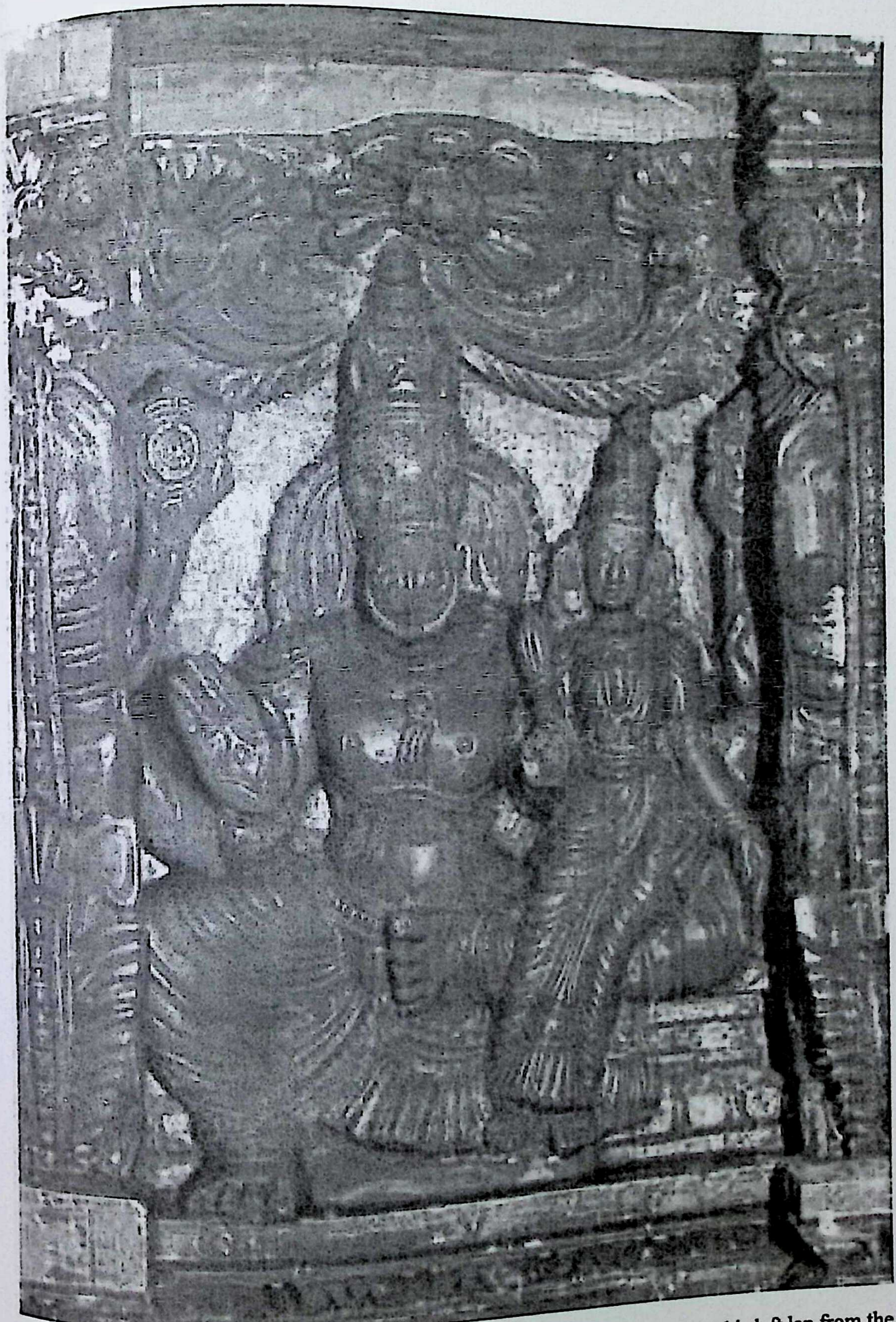
symbolically trying to convey to us not to get attached or give importance to the outer aspects (physical, mental, vital) but to see and discover our inner self, our own soul and thus merge with the lord.

Parthasarathi

Arjuna is the beloved friend and disciple of lord Krishna and hence called as Partha. Sri Krishna was in deep sleep when Arjuna and Duryodhana come to ask him for his help to fight on their side in the impending Kurukshetra war. While Arjuna was seated at the feet of the lord, Duryodhana was seated on the head side of the bed. On waking up Sri Krishna sees Arjuna first and then sees Duryodhana. Sri Krishna says that in the impending war he will not raise any arms to fight, he will have two things to give – one is his entire army and the other is "He", himself unarmed. Arjuna requests that he wants Sri Krishna on his side, unarmed but as his Sarathi, the charioteer to guide him in the war. Duryodhana is delighted to have the entire army as he feels Sri Krishna without his weapons is of no use and harmless. As the sarathi of Arjuna-Partha his favorite disciple Sri Krishna is called as Parthasarathi. Before the start of the Kurukshetra war in the middle of the battle-field, Arjuna suddenly feels that he has to unnecessarily kill all his near and dear ones, guru, nephew etc. only for a piece of land (Kingdom). Here Sri Krishna gives the knowledge of the Gita called as "Gita Upadesa". Arjuna with anjali hasta (folded hands) prays to Sri Krishna standing on the ground, while the lord as the Sarathi is standing on the chariot with a cane in one hand and the rein of the horse in the other, the back hands holding the conch and disc. He is beautifully dressed with golden crown, royal dress etc., with his right hand in Vaikhana mudra.

Anantasayana Vishnu (Seshasayi)

Sri Vishnu is seen to be reclined on the coils of Seshanaga or Adishesha with one of his hands bent to support his head. Adishesha or Seshanaga is seen floating on the ocean of milk with either five or seven hoods covering the head of his Lord. A lotus is always seen to emerge out form the "nabhi" (naval point) and Lord Brahma is always seated on it in anjali hasta. Hence Vishnu is also called as "Padmanabha" (beholding of the lotus at the naval point). Sri Lakshmi is usually seated at the feet of the lord gently massaging the lord "s legs placed on her thighs. The demon Madhu and Kaitabha may also be seen at times. The lord holds his conch,



Sri Vishnu as Hyagrivha , the horse headed Lord with Lakshmi seated on his left lap from the ratham of the Perumal kovil, Mahatma Gandhi road, Pondicherry.

Bewildered by the world in which he moved, disc, mace and lotus in his four other hands. The sayanamurti or reclining posture of lord Vishnu may be of four types called as Yogasayanamurti, Bhogasayanamurti, Virasayanamurti and Abhicerikasayanamurti. In some places instead of only Sri Lakshmi, Bhoodevi and Sridevi may be seen along with Narada, Garuda and Turbaru.

Adhinatha

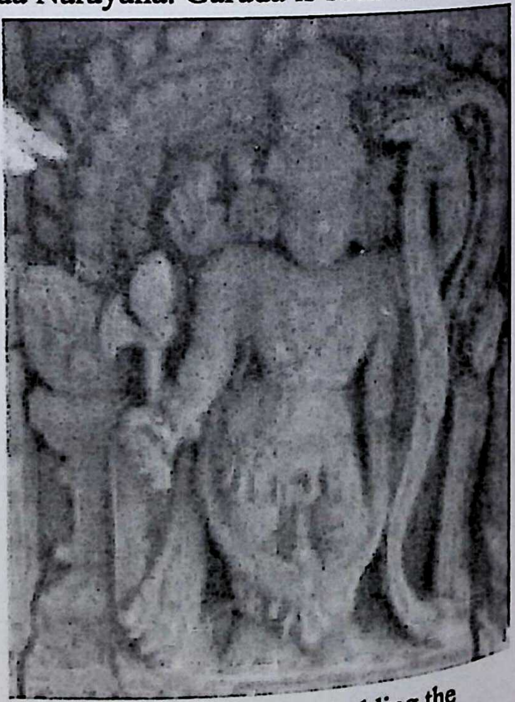
Vishnu is seated in Sukhasana on the coils of Adishesha and is called Adhinatha or Adhimurti. Sridevi and Bhudevi are seated on his two sides. He is also called as Vaikuntha murthi or Vaikuntha-Narayana as he is seated in his abode of Vaikuntha. His back hands have the disc and conch. Some panels are more elaborate with the presence of the Sapta rishis (seven sages), Indra, Brahma, Dakhinamurthi, Shiva, Garuda and others. In most panels Bhoodevi and Sridevi are in anjali hasta, otherwise Sridevi is seen to hold a vessel and matulinga while Bhoodevi holds a dayana and parrot. Two additional chouli bearers holding vessels of grain are usually seen behind Sridevi and Bhudevi. Sri Vishnu is beautifully decorated with Kirta Mukuta, Vanada and pitambara.

Garuda – Narayana

Garuda is an eagle and forms the vahana or vehicle of Sri Vishnu. When Vishnu is seen to be riding his vahana Garuda, he is called as Garuda Narayana. Garuda is seen with a human

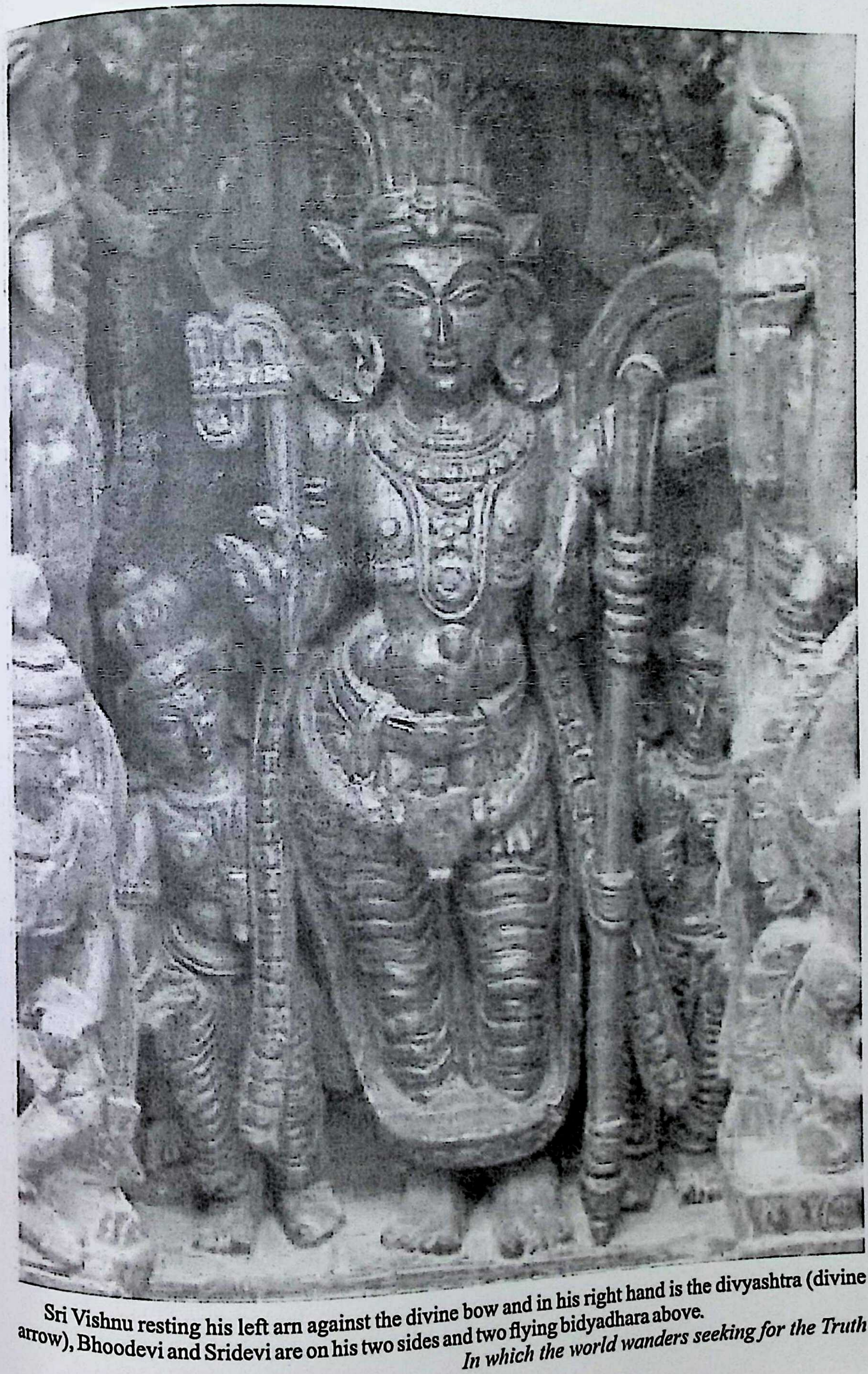
Bhoota vahana

His toys were the immortal verities



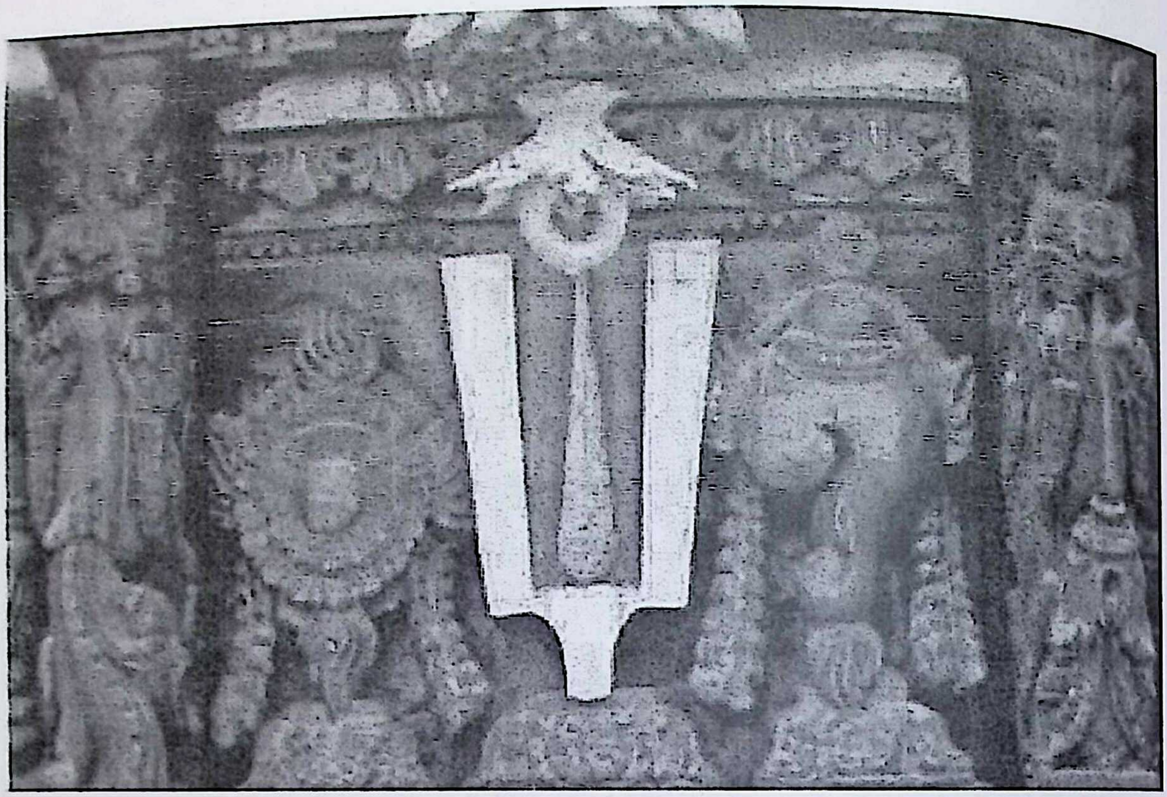
Sri Vishnu as Parasurama holding the mighty Parasu in the right hand.

A knowledge in the fathomless heart of Time



Sri Vishnu resting his left arn against the divine bow and in his right hand is the divyashtra (divine arrow), Bhoodevi and Sridevi are on his two sides and two flying bidyadhara above.

In which the world wanders seeking for the Truth



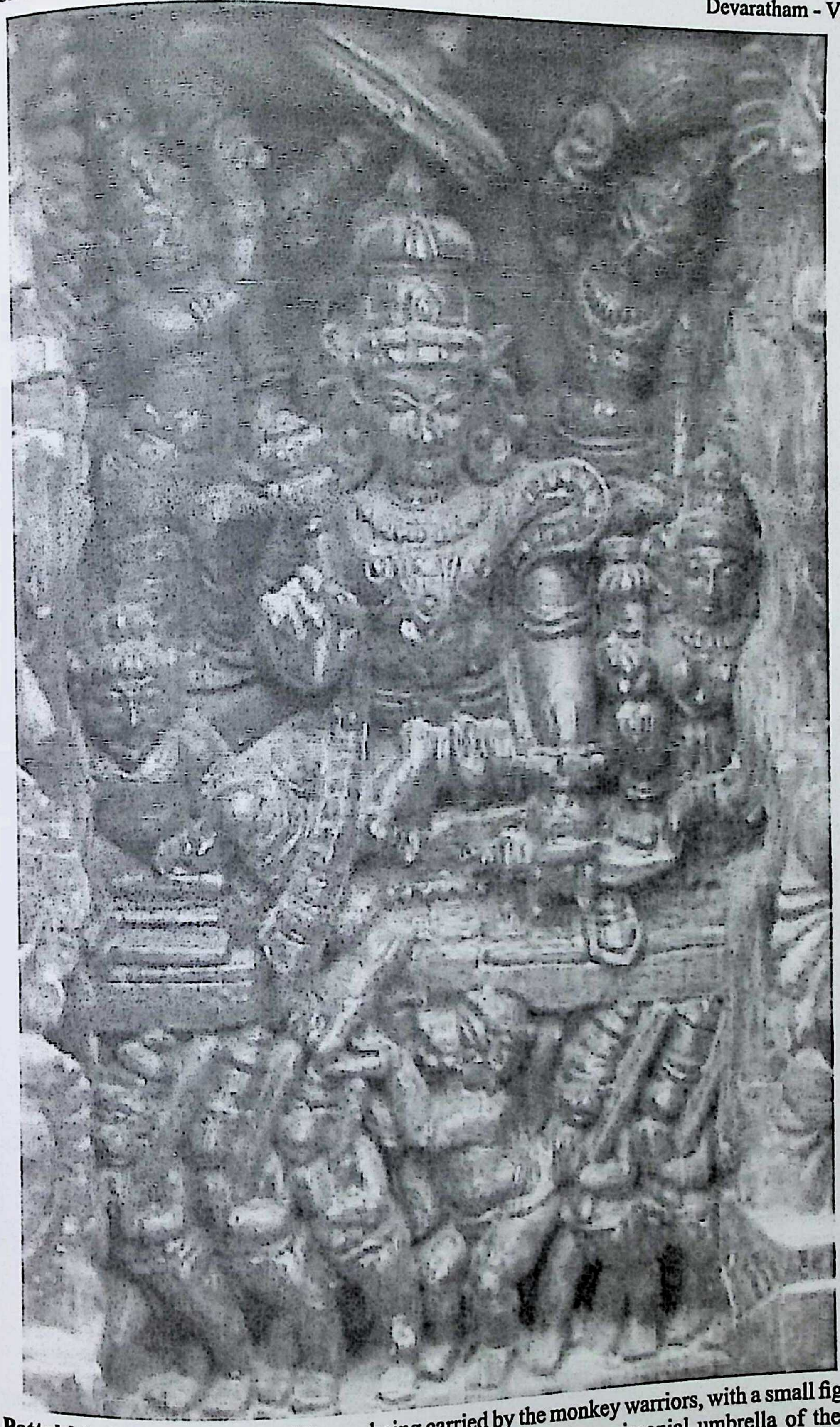
The divine symbol of Vishnu ,the Conch (Prajanjha shankha) and the Disc (Sudarshana chakra or sahashra kona chakra) In between is the Divine tilak, which every Vishnu bhakta (devotees) loves to put on their forehead.

Its power that makes the unknowable near and true,

face and the nose of an eagle i.e. is in zoomorphic form of a large bird with human face and eagle nose. Sri Vishnu is accompanied in many places by Bhoodevi and Sridevi seated on his thighs while riding Garuda.

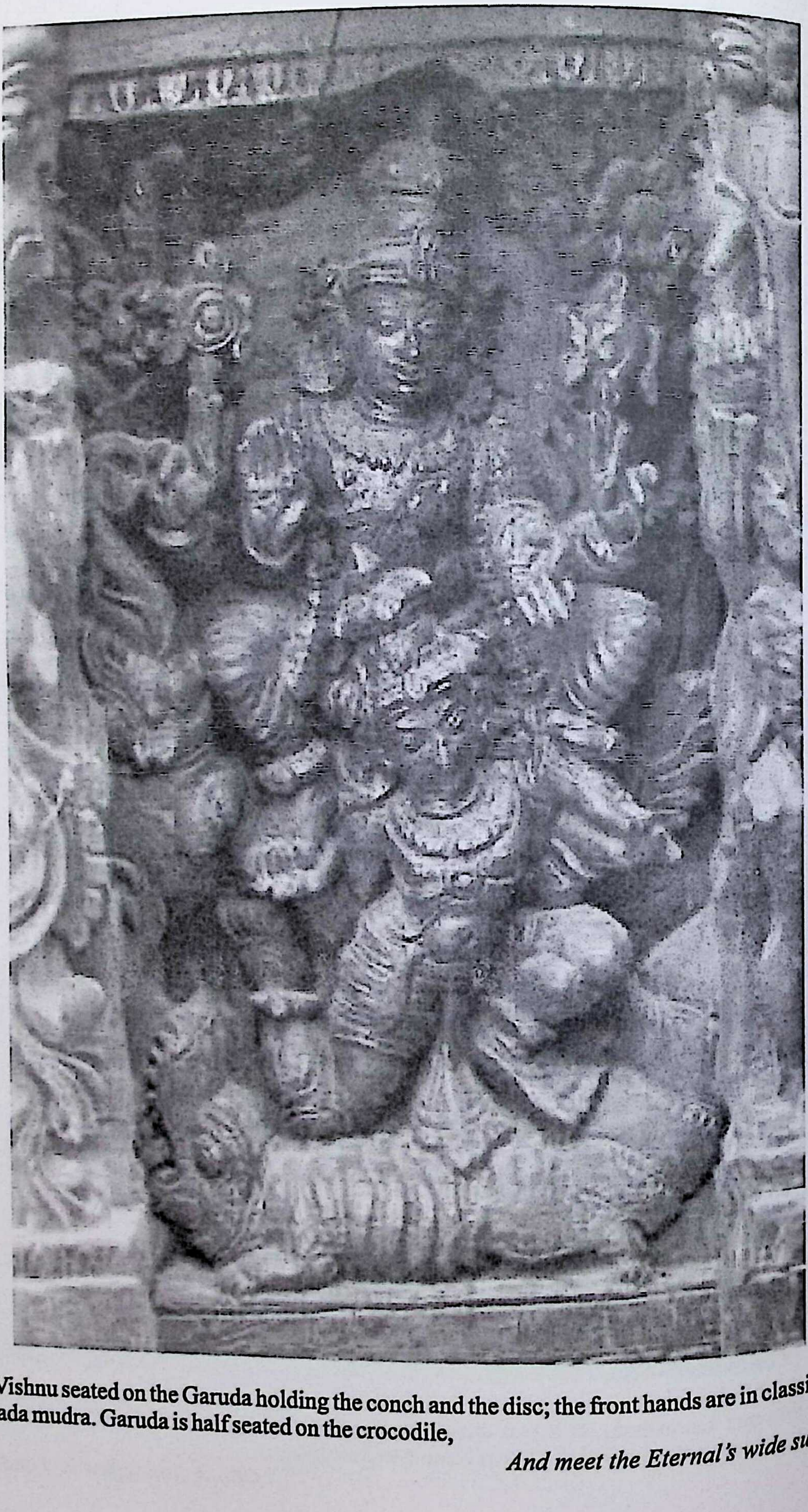
Hayagriva

It is said that Vishnu took the form of a horse head to rescue the Vedas from the horse headed demon; hence his name is Hayagriva or Hayastra (horse head). As Hayagriva he is seated on Shimhasana or Chandra bima or a lotus and holds the conch, rosary and a book (Vedas rescued) and nanamudra. Two of the hands may be seen holding the disc and in Vaikhana mudra (instead of the rosary and nana mudra). Rare elaborate presentation may include the lord embracing his two consorts Sridevi and Bhoodevi seated on his two thighs, while bhaktas are praying in anjali hasta as he rescued the Vedas and flying Vidyadharas are shown to be showering flowers from above.



Pattabhiseka: Vishnu as Lord Rama, being carried by the monkey warriors, with a small figure of queen Sita and Laxmanan, with two attendents fanning and the cerimonial umbrella of the king, probably depicting the procesion while returning to Ayodhya.

Of a beginningless and endless Calm,



Sri Vishnu seated on the Garuda holding the conch and the disc; the front hands are in classic abhaya and varada mudra. Garuda is half seated on the crocodile,

And meet the Eternal's wide sublimities

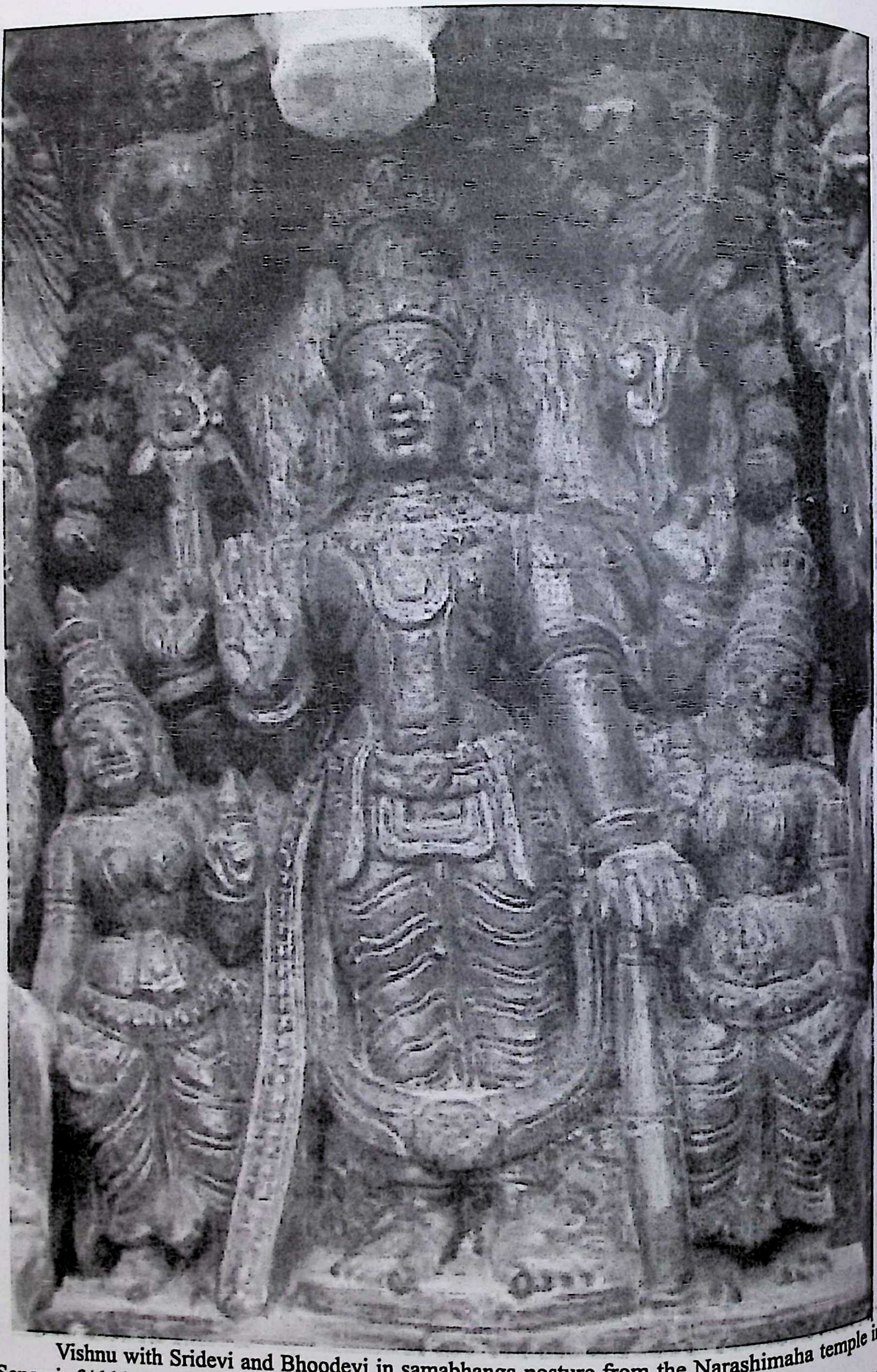
Viswarupa Vishnu

Lord Vishnu has shown his omnipresent form at certain points of time. During the war of Kurukshetra he grants the boon to Arjuna to comprehend his Viswarupa or Viratarupa. First he grants Arjuna the ability to perceive this incarnation by the „Divine Vision ". Sage Vyasa had already given the "Divine vision" to Sanjaya to visualize the entire proceeding of the Kurukshetra war and narrate the same to king Dhritarastra. Hence both Arjuna and Sanjaya could visualize the Viswarupa of Sri Vishnu. Some say that Viswarupa is different form "Viratarupa" iconographically. In Viswarupa Vishnu is seen with only four faces of Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Anirudha. The Viratarupa of Sri Vishnu is a polycephanous figure supposed to have many heads and hands. Some polycephanous figures show more than fifty heads in many layers and with hands simultaneously holding various arms.

The Viratrupa shows the lords creativity at one end and destruction at the other end; everything is emerging for the lord and again merging into him. He is self sustained, carrying within him all the gods, goddesses, men, animals demons i.e. all living creatures to include the whole of the universe. Only our sense of being separate from the lord makes us believe that we are the doer of the action. In true sense it is only the lord who is himself the doer as well as the action. The Lord also gives a glimpse of his being the All to Yasoda as Sri Krishna. When Yasoda forces Sri Krishna to open his mouth to prove that he has not eaten mud, Sri Krishna opens his mouth and Yasoda sees the entire universe, the sun, moon, earth, animals, planets, seas, etc. contained inside his mouth. She realizes that Sri Krishna who is her beloved child is actually non other than Lord Vishnu.

Mohini

Bhasmasura was a demon king who did tapasya to please Shiva. Shiva is very satisfied with his austerities and grants him a boon. Bhasmasura asks for a boon that on placing his hand on the head on anyone he could burn the person to ashes (Bhasma). As soon he was granted the boon, Bhasmasura wanted to test the efficacy of the boon by placing his hands on Shiva's head. Shiva had to run hither and hither away from the asura, lest he get burnt to ashes by his own boon which he had granted without thinking of its consequences. Lord Vishnu takes the form of a beautiful enchanting damsel called Mohini (Moha-is one that attracts) to protect Shiva.



Vishnu with Sridevi and Bhoodevi in samabhanga posture from the Narashimaha temple in Sengeri of Abhisekapakam village, near Pondicherry.

Drew God's approaches close, sweet, wonderful.

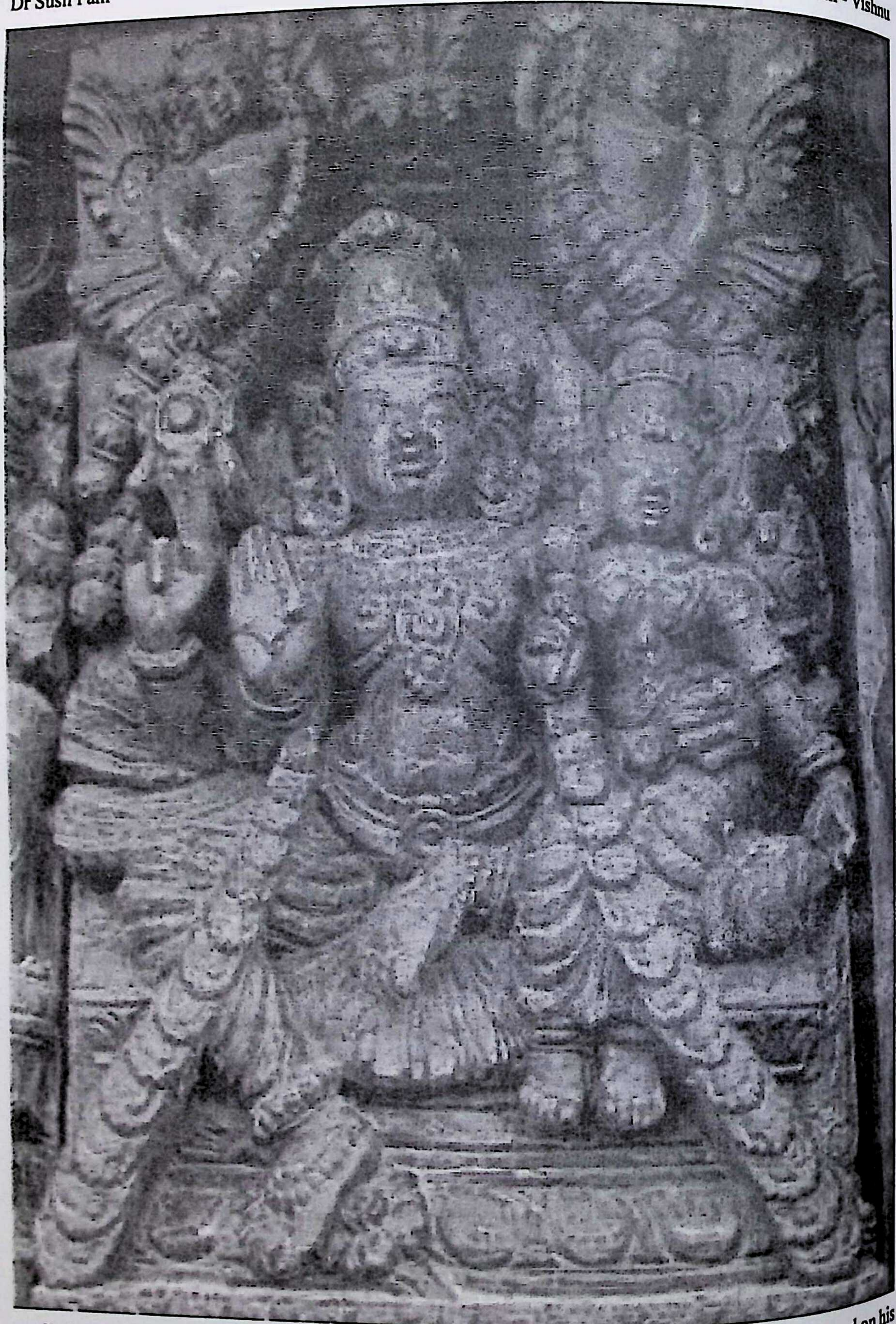
Bhasmasura gets distracted and wants to marry Mohini and Mohini agrees to it on the condition that Bhasmasura applies seasam oil on his head with his own hands, then has a bath and then comes to meet her. She would then accompany him as his bride. Bhasmasura is tricked and reduced to ashes when he places his hand on his own head to smear oil. It is said that Mohini accompanies Shiva as Bhikhyatana to the Dwarika forest and then Hari-hara-putra (Hari-Vishnu, Hara-Shiva, Putra-son) was born to them. He is known as Aiyappa. There is another story of Vishnu taking the form of Mohini to save the gods from the demons as soon as "Amrita" comes out of the Samudra manthana (Churning of the ocean of milk). As the devatas and asuras fight to get the nectar, Vishnu as Mohini appears on the scene and takes charge of the distribution of the amrita the nectar of immortality. All the asuras are enchanted by her beauty and wait on one side for their turn to come. She deliberately starts serving the devatas first and by the time she reaches the demons the Amrita is exhausted, thus the devatas became invincible.

Varadaraja –Perumal (Gajendra Moksha)

In this form lord Vishnu comes down to protect his beloved disciple, the elephant king Gajendra from the clutches of the crocodile, hence he is called as Gajendra moksha Vishnu. He slays the crocodile by his disc. He is seen to be seated on Garuda throwing the disc, while the other hands are shown holding lotus, conch and mace. The king elephant was too engrossed in enjoying his bath that he did not notice the danger ahead and was caught by the crocodile. It shows that man, unless he is alert is likely to face danger from the ego which masks his judgment and then has to struggle to get rid of it. It is only the lord's grace which can free us from attachments which holds us like the crocodile holding the leg of the elephant.

Manmatha

Manmatha literary means the one who churns the mind (mana-mind, matha-churning). Manmatha is considered to be the son of Vishnu and some consider him to be the (son of Sri Krishna) same as Pradyumna (as described in Amarakosa and Shilparatna). Manmatha has Rati as his consort seated on his left thigh. Manmatha himself is seated on a red lotus. He bears an arrow made of flower and bow made from sugarcane, ready to strike. The arrow when it strikes arises the feeling of love between the lovers. He may have two more hands in the back in



Lakshmi Narayana: Vishnu is seated magestically on the shimhasana with Lakshmi seated on his lap with his left hand fondly around her waist , the right hands in Abhaya mudra and holding the disc and the back hand holding the conch while the flying vidyadharas are seen above

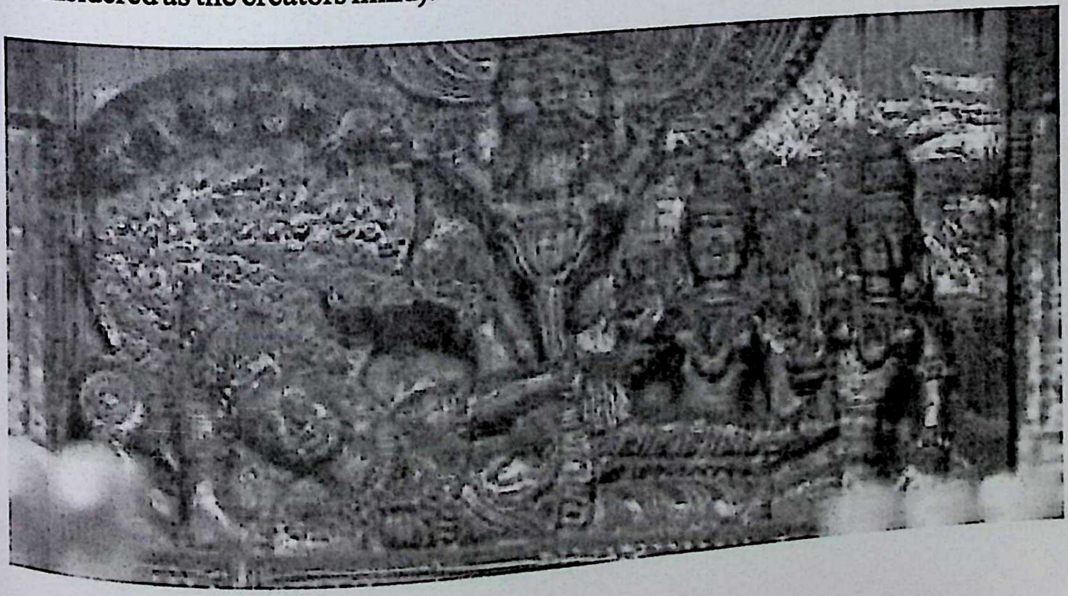
To create her Creator here was her heart's conceit,
To invade the cosmic scene with utter God.

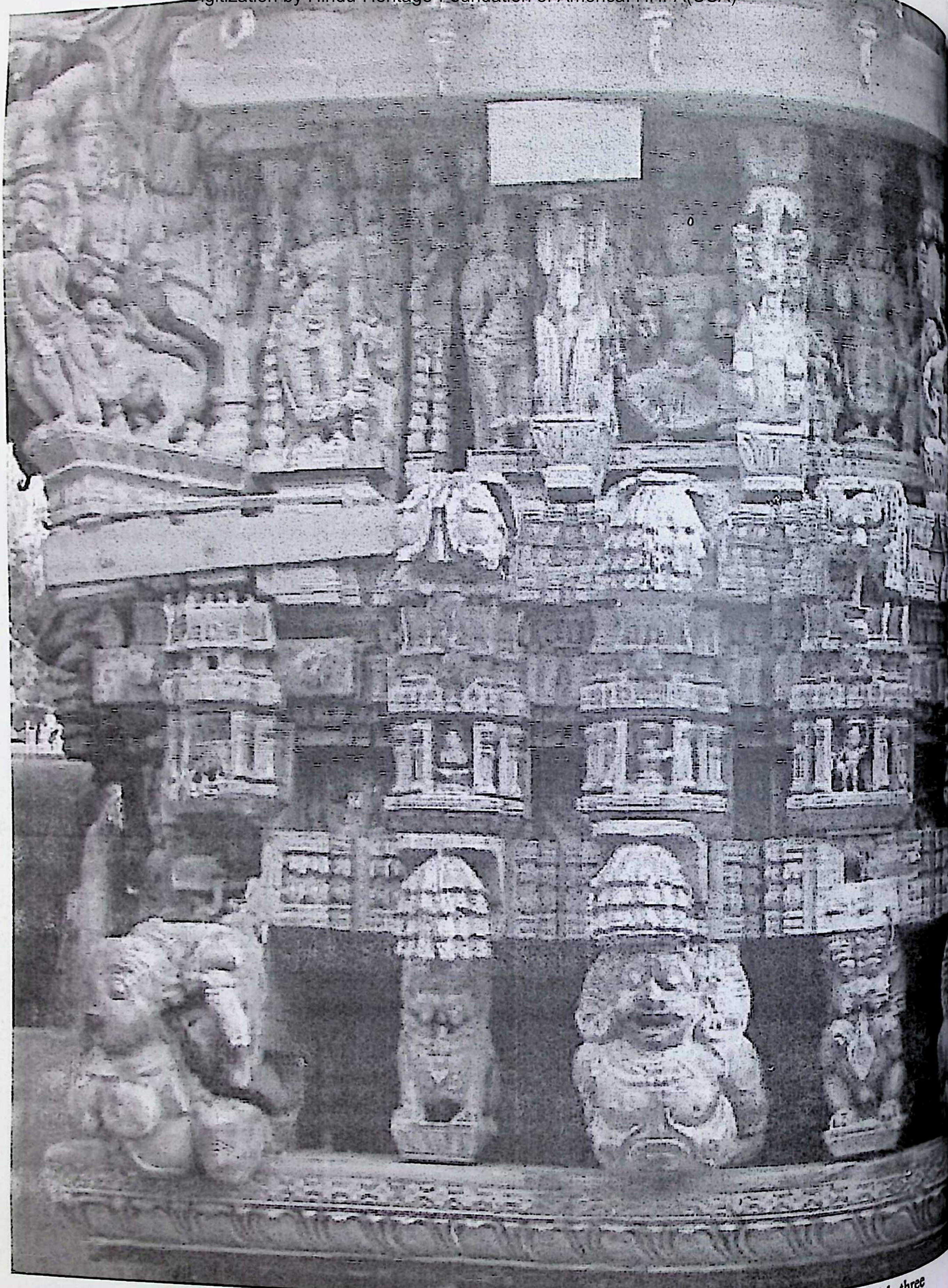
Varada and Abhaya mudra or holding a noose and a goad. He wears a crown studded with precious stones called ratnamukuta. He may have four more hands embracing four of his consorts Rati (goddess of love), Priti (goddess of pleasure), Shakti (goddess of power) and Bhadrashakti (goddess of Jewellery). Their Vahana is the parrot, so Manmatha and Rati are seated singly or together on the parrot, (rarely on a swan).

Other names of Manmatha include Kamadeva – lord of Kama or lord of love. Rasavriti, Ananga (incorporeal), Ratikantha – lord of Rati, Puspavarta or Pushpadhara – the bearer of the bow of flower.

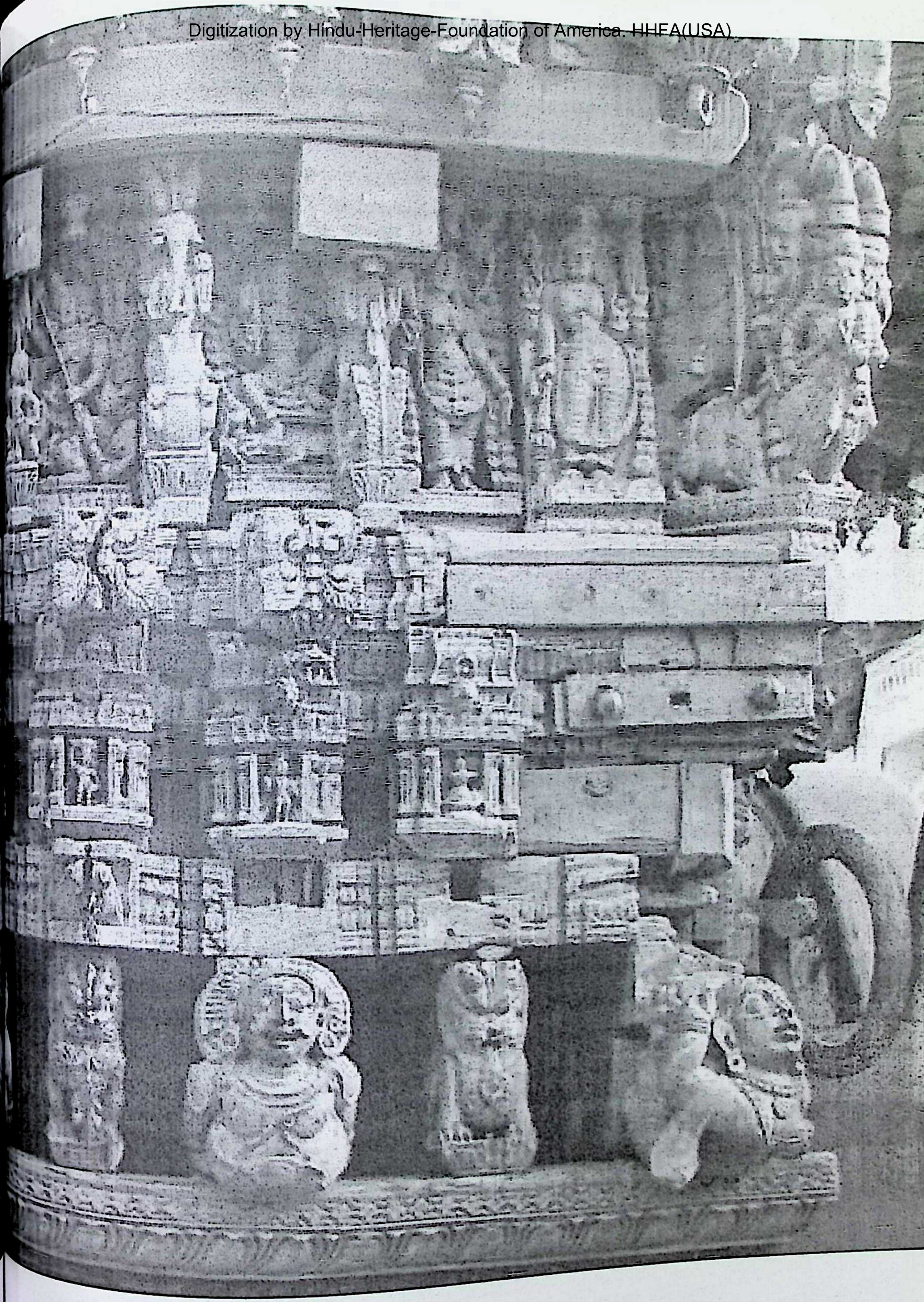
Sudarsana

Sudarsana chakra is the personified disc of Lord Vishnu and hence considered as an embodiment of the lord. Sudarsana is satakona chakra – the disc with hundred corners. Sri Vishnu as Sudarsana may be presented separately or inside the chakra itself. The Shilparatna describes him to be ferocious with all the weapons conch, disc, bow, chisel, knife, arrow, trident, noose, sword, shield, plough, cub and spear. Hence it is called the Niga chakra – the wheel to punish the offender. At the end of the Kurukshetra war, the pandavas along with Sri Krishna visit the "Vetalashena" and ask him as to what did he see during the war. "Vetalashena" bows to Sri Krishna and takes permission to tell the truth, that all that he could see was only one disc – "Sudarsana" going about destroying and annihilating everything on both sides – the Pandavas side and Kaurava side. It also symbolizes the "wheel of time" (Sudarsana chakra is also considered as the creators mind).





The body of the Veerapatinam shakti devaratham showing the bhootapar at the base with three shivaganas and two rolling devotees at the corners, lion mottifs in between, small carvings with Nadana Ganapati above, and the main panel with Amman in her many forms like Kali dancing, Mahisasura mardhini etc, two dwarapalika at the ends and finely carved horses at the corners of the ratham.



Labours life to equate with the Supreme And reconcile the Eternal and the Abyss.

जगन्मोहनीयं तु वाग्वादिनीयं सुहृत्पोषिणीशत्रुसंहारणीयम् ।
वचस्तम्भनीयं किमुच्चाटनीयं स्वरूपं त्वदीयं न विन्दन्ति देवाः ॥

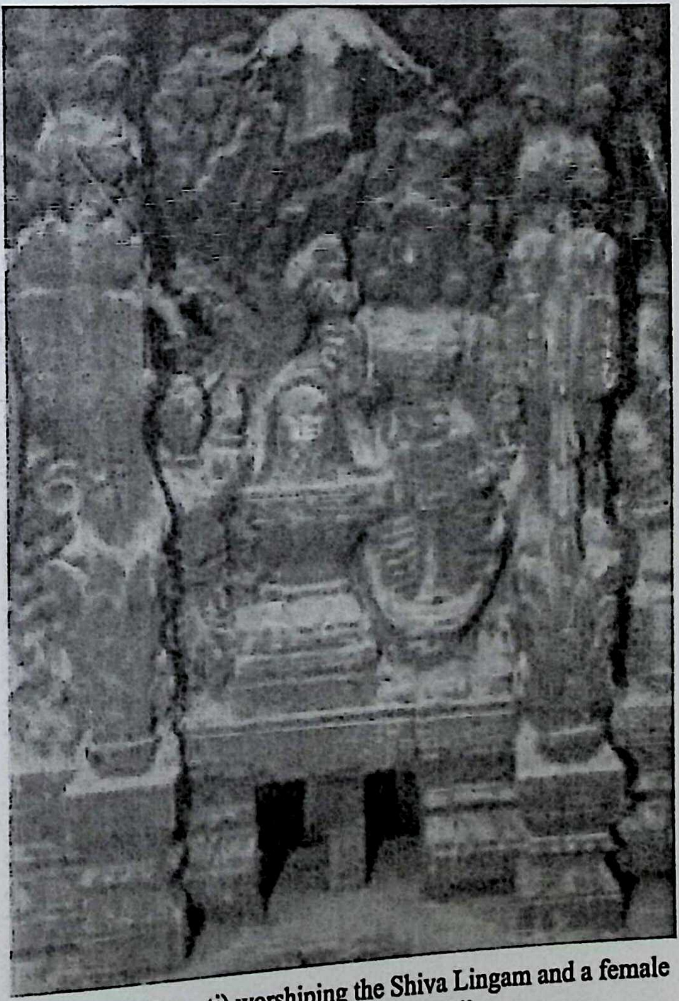
jaganmohanīyaṃ tu vāgvādinīyaṃ suhṛtpoṣiṇīśatrusaṃhāraṇīyam|
vacastambhanīyaṃ kimuccāṭanīyaṃ svarūpaṃ tvadīyaṃ na vindanti devāḥ||

(Salutations to Devi Kalika) You are the Power Enchanting the Worlds, and (what more), You are the Power Proclaiming Speech itself, You are the Power which Nourish the Good-Hearted, and You are the Power which Destroy the Enemies (i.e. Evil Hearted), You are the Power which can Suppress the Speech, and what more, You are the Power which can Eradicate Speech itself (i.e. destroy the vain pride of enemies), Even the Devas do not know Your Transcendental Nature.

Chapter - XI

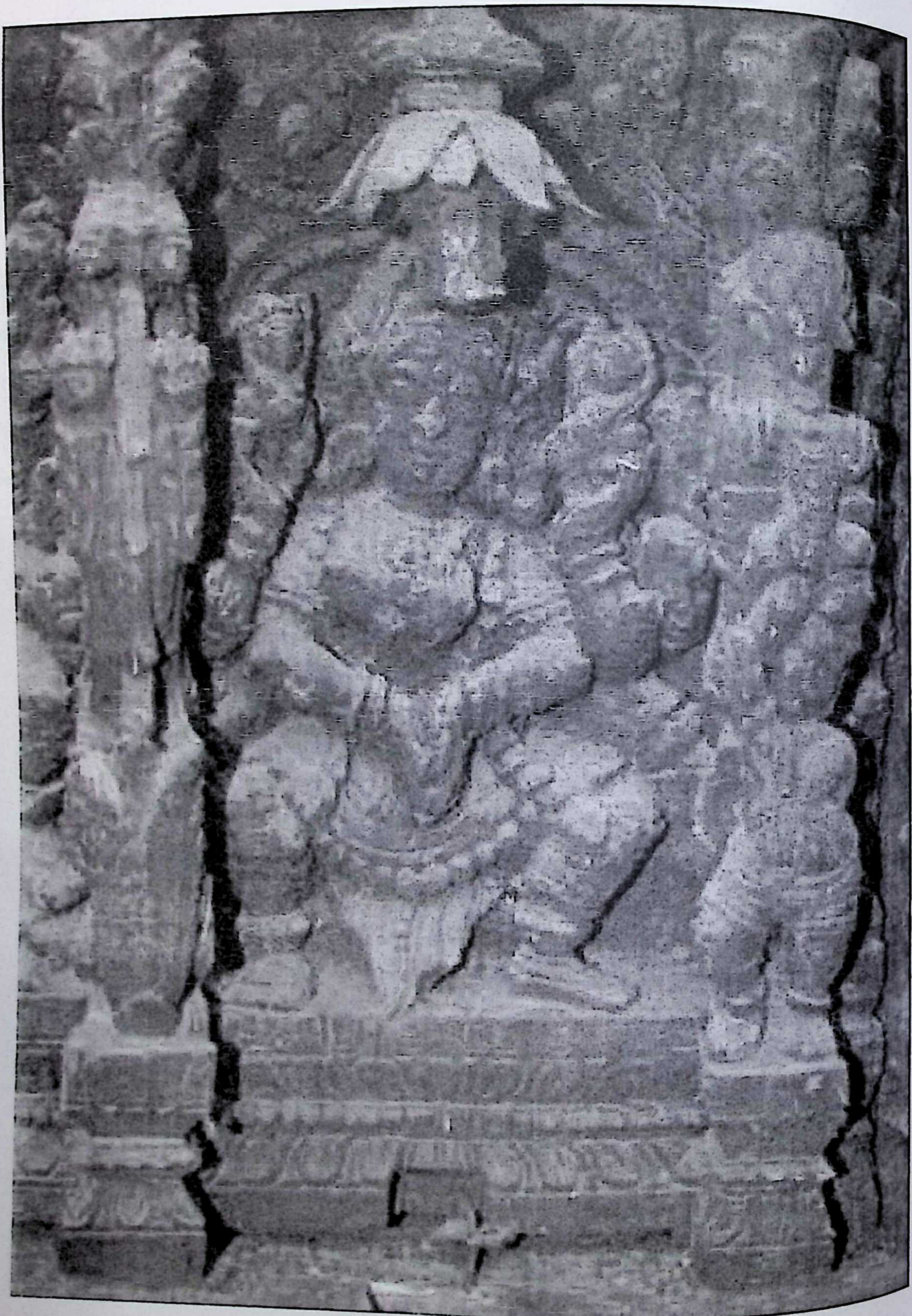
Shakti Goddess

There is a popular saying about the relationship of Shiva and Shakti "Without Him I exit not and without She I manifest not." This is to only re-enforce the fact that there are two components of existence. The silent and immobile self or soul is the source of all inspiration but as such is not involved in the action. It is Shiva the supreme soul who is the source for everything seen or unseen. The other is the action, force, power and energy to act or manifest the one which manifests the soul. It is Shakti or Prakriti. In the traditional Indian spiritual and religious concept, Shakti is goddess who forms the consort of the Gods. All the Gods can manifest only through their Shakti. Hence Purusha and Prakriti form the inseparable aspects of Shiva and Shakti. Purusha forms the source, hence absolutely still, unmoved, immobile, silent, self contained in itself, but if it has to act it has to do so only through Prakriti represented by Shakti. It is said that the great Divine mother – "Aditi" is above all and has given rise to all the gods and goddess. The trinity of Hindu gods are "Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara" with their consorts "Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati". In south India Parvati is popularly known as "Amman". All the goddesses are mother like, hence are called as Thayar in Tamil.



Amman (Parvati) worshiping the Shiva Lingam and a female devotee nearby from the Amman ratham Villianur

The Mother of Might looked down on passing things,



Amman as Kali in her firece dance; from the amman devaratham of Villiįanur Thirukameswar temple, Pondicherry.

I am charged by God to do his mighty work,

Saraswati

Saraswati is the consort of Lord Brahma – the creator of the world. Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge and learning. She is also the beholder of "speech" hence is the goddess of words and expression. She is always represented with a Veena in her hands. She also holds a book and a rosary to indicate that she is the path to all knowledge. She is also called as Sharada, Veenapani, Vinapani, Bharati, Kalaivani and Kalaimangala. She is usually seated on a pink lotus. She may be presented as standing in Samabhanga. She may be seen along with Lord Brahma, seated on a swan, particularly in the "Urdhatandava" panel.

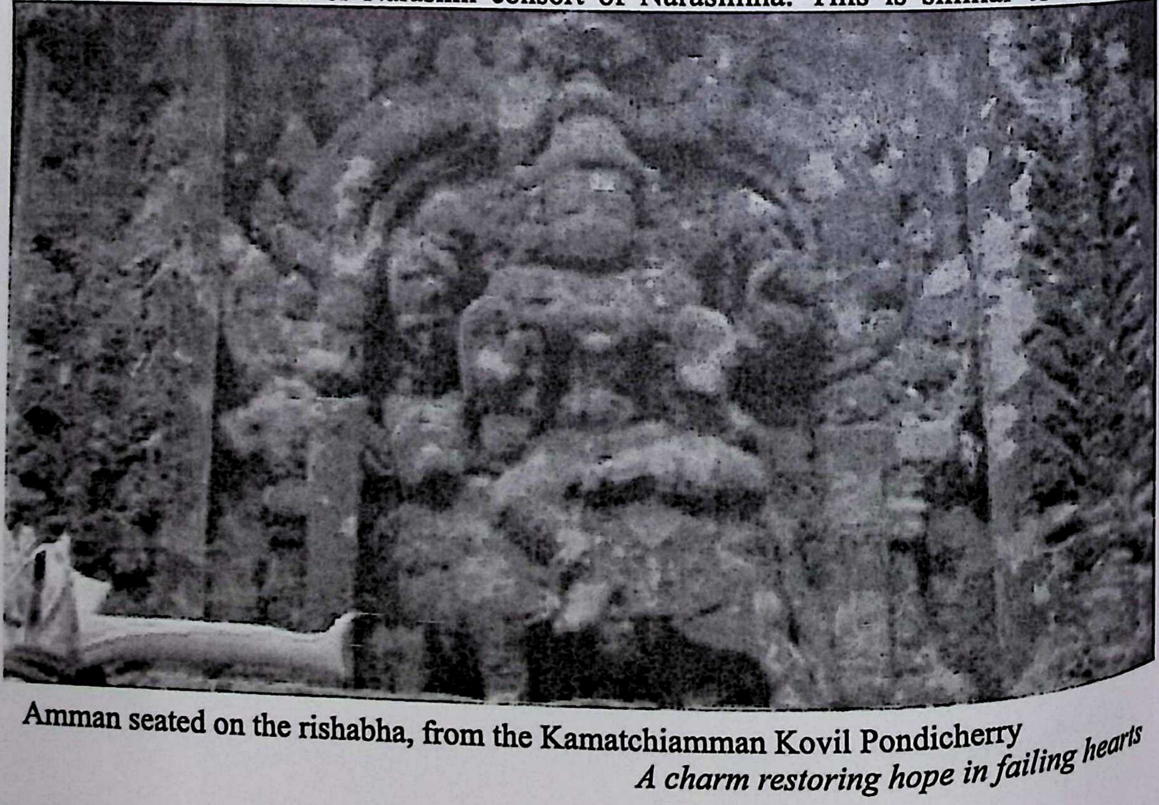
Gajalakshmi

Gajalakshmi forms a very popular form of Lakshmi and one of the (eight) Astha Lakshmi seen in temple cars. She is seated on a pink lotus and holds a lotus and vessel of amrita ghata in the front hands and the back hands hold the Conch and Bilva fruit. Sometimes the front hands may be in Varada and Abhaya mudra. She is always identified by the presence of two elephants (gaja) behind her with raised proboscis pouring water as if performing "abhisheka" to the goddess. Both the elephants are supposed to represent "Aryabhata". Lakshmi wears a white silk sari. Neck, hands and waist are decorated in jewelry and she is wearing a Karanda mukuta (decorated crown). She is present in all the rathams irrespective of the presiding deity of the ratham, hence is always present in Vishnu, Shiva, Vinayaga and Shakti rathams.

Amman standing with the long bow and an bajra in the front hands and a kapala on the left back hand. *Her speech like a war-cry rang or a pilgrim chant.*

Saptamatrikas

In the story of Andhakasura, the asura had got a boon from Lord Brahma, after lot of austerities, that if any drop of his blood falls on the ground, it will give rise to an asura with equal strength, power and force. Hence the asura considered himself to be invincible and started torturing all creatures. As the atrocities of the asura becomes intolerable, all the sages and rishis prayed to Lord Shiva to slay the asura. Lord Shiva went on fighting with the asura but was unable to defeat or slay him, as hundreds of asuras continued to be born from the blood falling on the ground from Andhakasura. Here the consorts of the gods come to the rescue of Lord Shiva as the "Saptamatrikas". They form the seven mothers and drink the blood of Andhakasura before it could fall on the ground. Thus Lord Shiva could finally slay and kill Andhakasura. The seven consorts of the seven gods are Brahmi or Saraswati – consort of Lord Brahma, Maheswari or Bhairavi or Raudri (Rudrani) consort of Lord Mahesh, Kumari or Kartikayani consort of Lord Muruga or Kartikeya, son of Shiva – Parvati. Vaishnavi or Lakshmi and Varahi – consorts of Lord Vishnu, Indrani consort of Lord Indra, Chamundi or Chamundeswari the consort of Yamaraj. These Saptamatrikas carry the same weapons as their consorts or lords and are thus identified. Some say there are eight instead of seven mothers and that includes Chandrika or Narasimi consort of Narasimha. This is similar to the eight



Amman seated on the rishabha, from the Kamatchiamman Kovil Pondicherry

A charm restoring hope in failing hearts manifestations of Sri Lakshmi – the Astha Lakshmi. There is a another interpretation of the Saptamatrikas, each is an embodiment of the respective god (Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Indra, Yamaraj, Vinayaga and Muruga) only in the female form with their full power, they had come to help Shiva in his battle against Andhakasura.

There is a great symbolism in the presentation of the Sapta matrikas. Each represents a part of the human mind. One needs to conquer each of these aspects. They are Kama or desire, Krodha or anger, Lobha or greed, Mada or Vanity, Moha or desire, Matsarya or fault finding, Paisurya and asuya or envy. The demons name is very much symbolic as well, Andhakasura means – andha and asura, the demon which can blind us. The regeneration of the asura in full force each time the blood drops to the ground is also symbolic, it means that all the above aspects of the lower nature continues to rise again and again with full force each time one tries to get rid of them. One needs to get rid of all of them by the grace of the Divine. One needs to get victory over all the aspects of lower nature to be able to reach beyond the tangled aspects of the lower mind to the higher state of pure mind and only then can proceed to realize the Self. Most of the Saptamatrikas are presented in a single panel in the temple cars; sometimes they are present along with their consorts.

Mahisasuramardhini: On the left is the asura with a head of a mahisi (buffalo), while Amman uses both her front hands to kill the asura, on the right side she is killing the asura with single hand and the face of the asura is that of a man, from Amman ratham Villianur.

Chapters of her metaphysical romance
Invading Matter with the Spirit's ray,

Parvati as Kamakshi Utshava murti of Kamatchiamman koil during the procession at Pondicherry.
Sovereign was her word of luminous command,

Amman on shimasana

Amman in samabhanga

All beautiful grew, subtle and high and strange.

Brahmi

Brahmi is the consort of Lord Brahma. She is in fact presented just like Lord Brahma with four heads and four hands. The front two hands are usually in Abhaya and Varada mudra with the back hands holding the rosary and trident. She is seated on a swan and wears a beautiful Jatamukuta. In many of the temple cars with Shakti as the main deity we have Brahmi as the Sarathi or the charioteer of the temple car. She holds the reins of the galloping horses in front.

Maheswari

The goddess Maheswari is the consort of Lord Mahesh (Shiva). She is usually presented with five heads and ten hands. The front two hands are always in Abhaya and Varada mudra; the hands at the back hold the rosary, trident, drum and other weapons. She is usually seated on the Vrishabha vahana (Bull).

Kumari

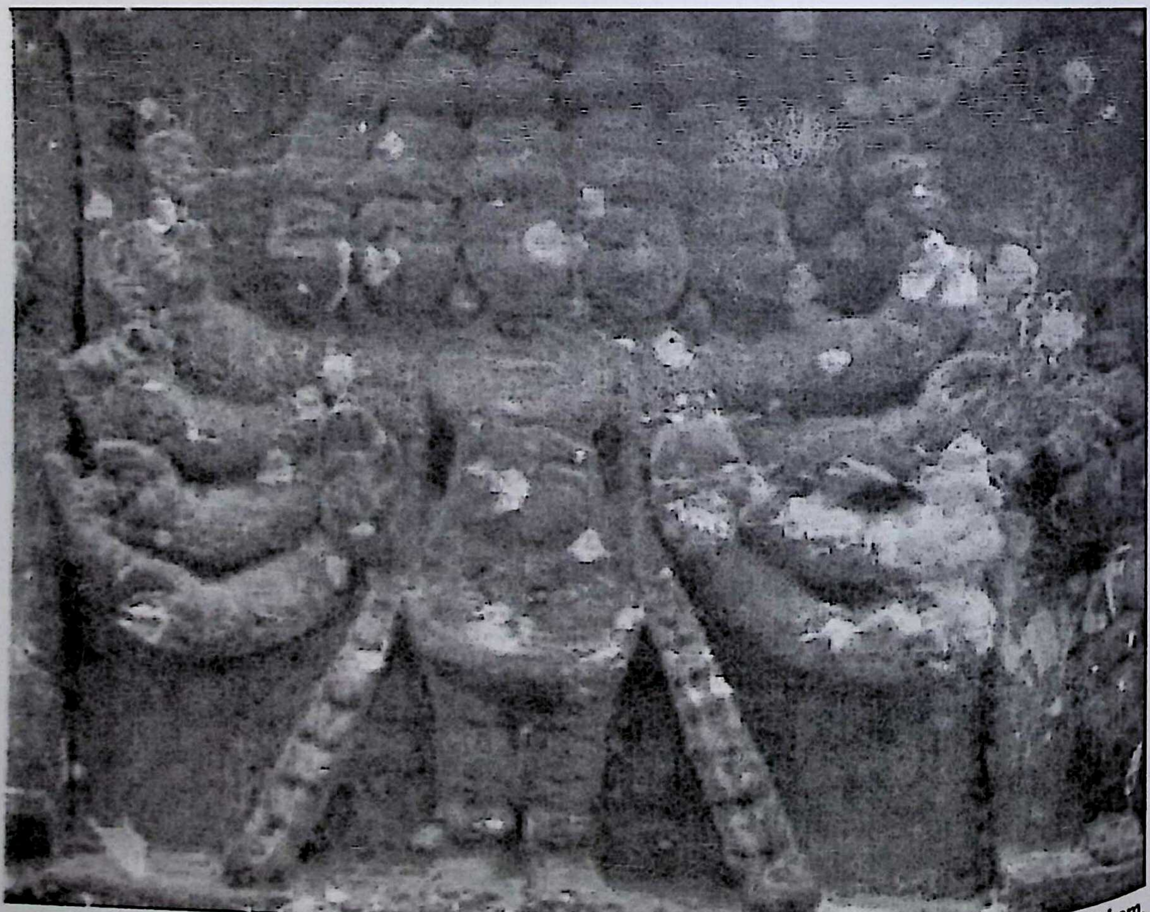
Kumari is the consort of Kumara or Lord Muruga. Hence she has six heads and twelve hands. She is seated on the peacock and holds the cock, and spear besides other weapons, the front two hands being always in Abhaya and Varada mudra. She wears the Karanda mukuta.

Varahi

Varahi is the consort of Lord Vishnu in his Varaha avatara. Hence she appears like Varaha in the zoomorphic form with the head of a boar and the body of a woman. She has the buffalo as her Vahana. She holds the plough and wooden pastel in the back hands and the front hands are in Abhaya and Varada mudra. She wears a kirta mukuta.

Vaishnavi

Vaishnavi forms the consort of Lord Vishnu hence the name Vaishnavi. Hence she is seen to hold the conch and disc in the back hands and the front hands are in Varada and Abhaya mudra. She is seated on a eagle and wears a kirta mukuta.



Panchamookha Amman (five faces Parvati) from the Kamatchiamman kovil devaratham, Puducherry. She has ten hands with the front two hands in abhaya and varada mudra.

Her austere regions and her musing depths,

Indrani

Indrani is the consort of Lord Indra. Hence she is seen to ride an elephant and holds the spear and ankusa (elephant goad).

Vighneswari

She forms the consort of Lord Ganesha or Vighneswara, the lord who removes all obstacles. As Vighneswari she rides the ram.

Chamundeswari

She is the consort of "Yamaraj"; hence she rides a corpse, holds a skull and a trident. She wears a radiant mukuta or crown and a garland of skulls called as Kapalamala or mundamala. She has got the name because she is supposed to of have destroyed and slayed the terrible demons "Chanda and munda". She has a very ferocious face and is the queen of death and dances on the slayed demons corpse. The Agni Puranas describe eight forms of Chamundi. The Raudra Chamundi has eight hands holding the shield, sword, skull, noose, axe, club and trident. She is decked with beautiful ornaments, Pitambara, Skandamala or mundamala (necklace of skulls). The dress she wears is up to her knees and the demon is held firmly under her feet. The trident may be seen piercing the demon in some of the carvings of the temple cars.

Aindri

This Devi among the Saptamatrikas is supposed to have thousand eyes. Shilparatna and Manasara do not give detailed description of the Saptamatrikas but the Kasyapasilpasastra and Srittavainidhi provide some description of these goddess. Aindri rides an elephant. The Devi mahatmayam describes in great detail the Saptamatrikas. It says that all of them ride ratham or chariots. All of them are seated in Bhadrapitha in lalitasana posture.

Durga

Goddess Parvati, the Shakti of Lord Shiva had to take the manifestation as Durga Devi to slay the demon "Durgama". (Hence her name Durga Devi). The Shilpashastra, Shilparatna and Srittavainidhi describe eight forms of Durga. Among them Vana-durga is very popularly seen holding conch, sword, shield, bow and arrow, trident or trishul and in suchi mudra. When she is shown with only four hands then she holds only the conch and discin two hands, the other two hands are in Abhaya and Varada mudra. Then she is called as Katayani. She is standing on a buffalo head in samabhanga pose.

Mahisasuramardini

Goddess Parvati took the avatar of Mahisasuramardini to destroy the demon with the head of a buffalo, called as Mahisasura (Mahisi – buffalo, asura - demon) she is also called by many other names like Kali, Kumari, Kapali, Mahakali, Chandi, Katayani, Vijayi, Kaushiki, Karala and Kantaravasini.

It is said that the birth of the demon asura Mahisasura happened to that of a buffalo who had drank the water of lake where the germ seeds (sperms) of a Rishi had accidentally spilled. Hence the demon was born with a buffalo head and human body and was very powerful. As the demon was very strong, all the goddess gave their power to Parvati to fight the asura. She rides the lion to kill the asura. She has usually eight to ten arms, and is seated or standing on a lion. She is seen to hold the trident (trishul) aimed or piercing the asura placed at her feet, the lion ready to bite the asura. She also holds the cub, bow & arrow, kettle drum, sword etc.

Chapter - XII

Sri Lakshmi and her forms

Adi Lakshmi is also called as **Maha Lakshmi** and is considered to be an ancient form of Lakshmi and incarnation of Lakshmi as daughter of the sage Bhrigu. She is the mother of all and usually shown to be seated on a lotus with the front hands holding the lotus and a pataka or white flag, the other two hands in abhaya and Varada mudra.

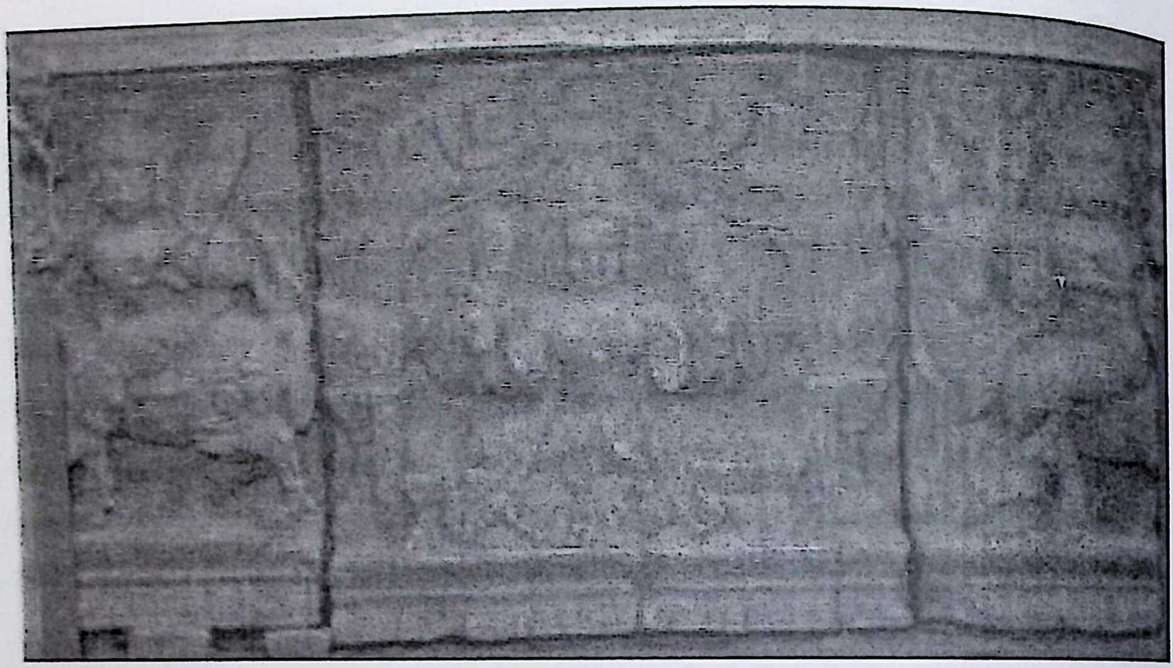
Dhana Lakshmi

Dhana Lakshmi is the embodiment of Lakshmi who bestows her devotee with wealth, gold and riches. She is usually six-armed, wearing red garments, holding a chakra (discus), shankha (conch), Kalasa (water pitcher with mango leaves and a coconut on it) or Amrita kumbha (a pitcher containing Amrita - elixir of immortality) , bow-arrow, a lotus and an hand in abhaya mudra from which gold coins are seen falling for the devotee.

Danalakshmi

Self-guarded in the silence of her strength

A magic passion trembles in its blooms,



Sri Lakshmi with Agni on the right, Villianur temple, Puducherry

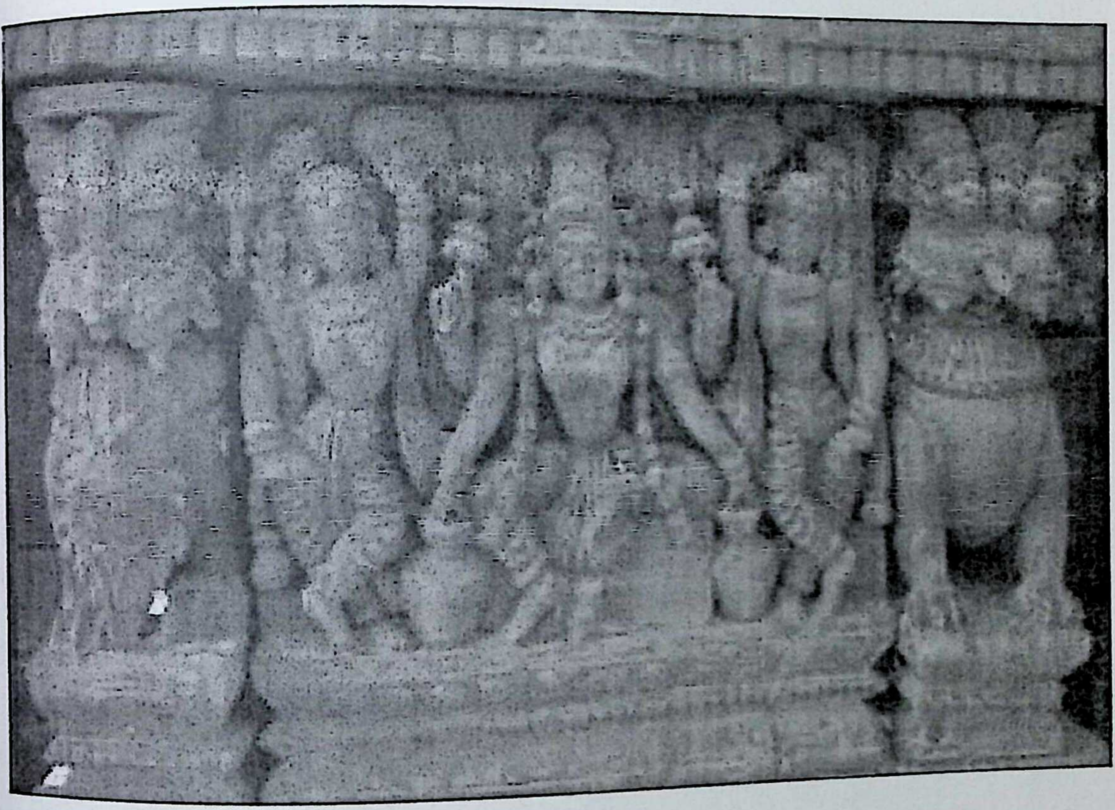
This sweetness's priestess and this reverie's muse.

Lakshmi seated from Villianur temple Puducherry

Even when she bent to meet earth's intimacies

Dhanya Lakshmi

Dhanya lakshmi is that aspect of Sri lakshmi which bestows riches in the form of agricultural wealth. She is worshiped by the famers and their families so that there is good rain and abundant agricultural yeild. She is usually eight armed, wearing green garments, holding two lotuses, gada (mace), paddy crop, sugarcane, bananas, other two hands in abhaya mudra and Varada mudra.



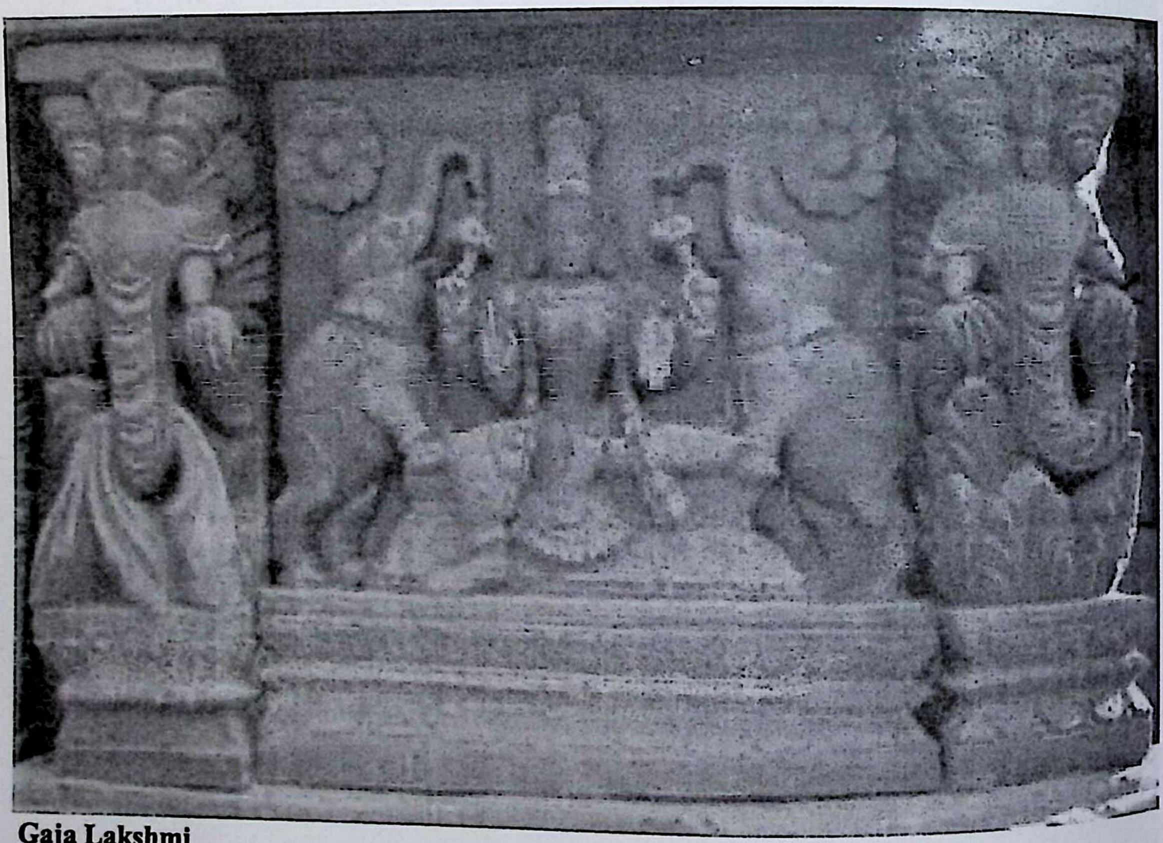
Lakshmi as **Arnapoorana** *Her spirit kept the stature of the gods;*

Veera Lakshmi

Dhairya Lakshmi is bestower of valour in battles and courage and strength for overcoming difficulties in life. She is eight-armed, in red garments and carries chakra, shankha, bow and arrow, trishul (or sword), gold bar or book, other two hands in abhaya mudra and varada mudra.

Gaja Lakshmi

Gaja Lakshmi is considered to be the bestower of animal wealth, like cattle, hens, horses etc. Swami Chidananda interprets Gaja Lakshmi as giver of power of royalty. According to Hindu mythology, Gaja Lakshmi brought back the wealth lost by Indra (king of the devatas) from the ocean, Vasudha Narayanan interpret the name as "one who is worshipped by elephants. Gaja Lakshmi is usually four-armed, in red garments, carries two lotuses in two arms with the other two arms in abhaya mudra and varada mudra, and has two elephants performing abhisheka with holy water on either side.



Gaja Lakshmi

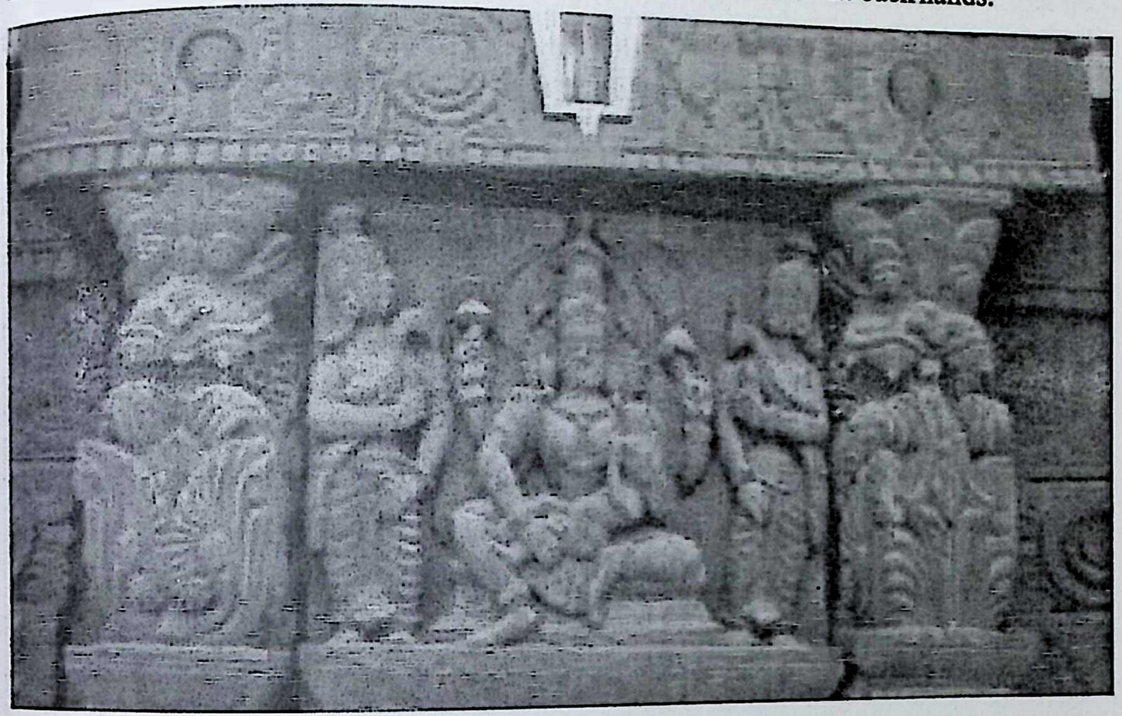
The Power within her shaped her moulding sense

Vijaya Lakshmi

She is the giver of victory, not only in battles but also in conquering hurdles in order to beget success. She is eight-armed, in red garments, carries chakra, shankha, sword, shield, lotus, pasha, other two hands in abhaya mudra and varada mudra.

Santana Lakshmi

She is the bestower of off-springs and is usually six-armed. She carries two kalash (water pitcher with mango leaves and a coconut on it), a sword, a shield, a child on her lap, with a hand in abhaya mudra and the other holding the child. She holds a lotus on the back hands.



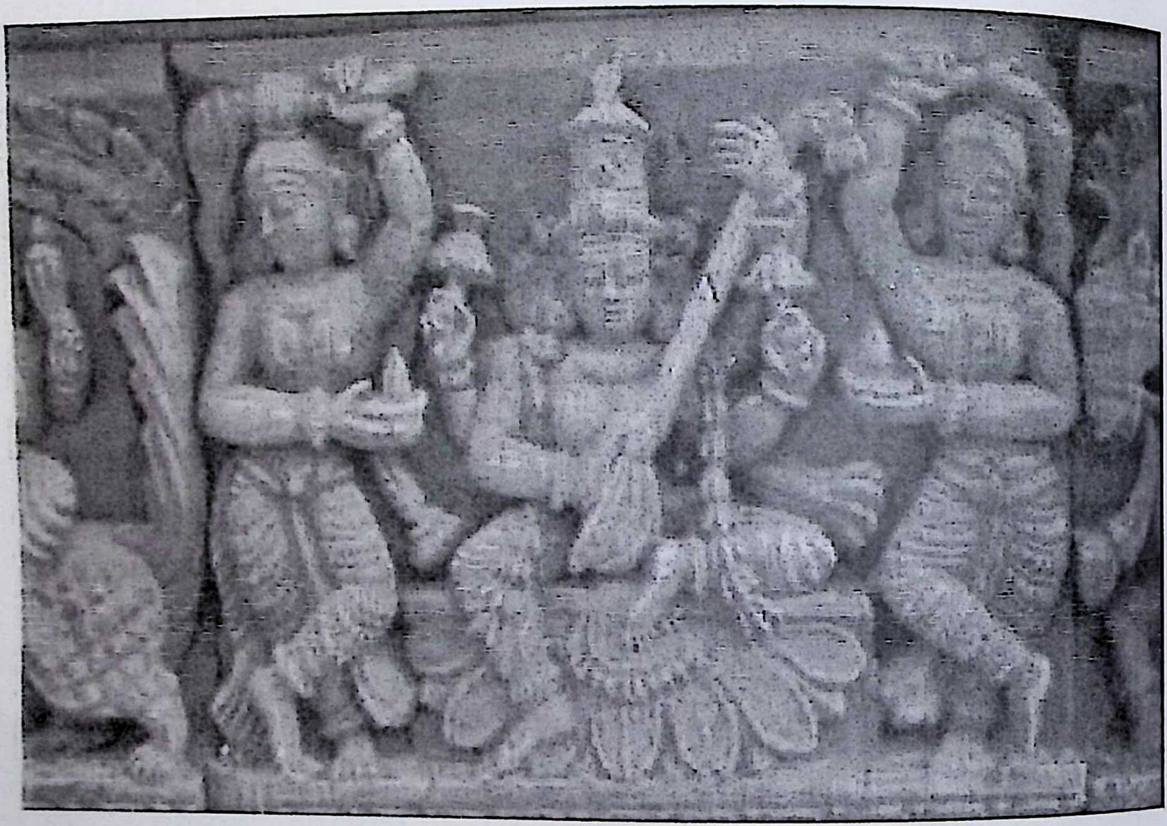
Santana Lakshmi

The ideal goddess in her house of gold

Lakshmi with attendents

Her spirit kept the stature of the gods;

Vidya Lakshmi: She the bestower of knowledge of arts and sciences. **Aishwarya Lakshmi** is the Goddess of riches. **Saubhagya** is the goddess who is supposed to be the giver of prosperity in general. **Rajya Lakshmi** "She who blesses kings, rulers, nobles etc with power to rule and discern. **Vara Lakshmi** "The lady who bestows beautiful boons



Saraswati with attendant.

This sweetness's priestess and this reverie's muse.

Vinayaga - Vignaraja - Gajanana - Ganesha

हरिः ओम् ॥
वक्रतुण्ड महाकाय सूर्यकोटिसमप्रभ ।
निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव सर्वकार्येषु सर्वदा ॥

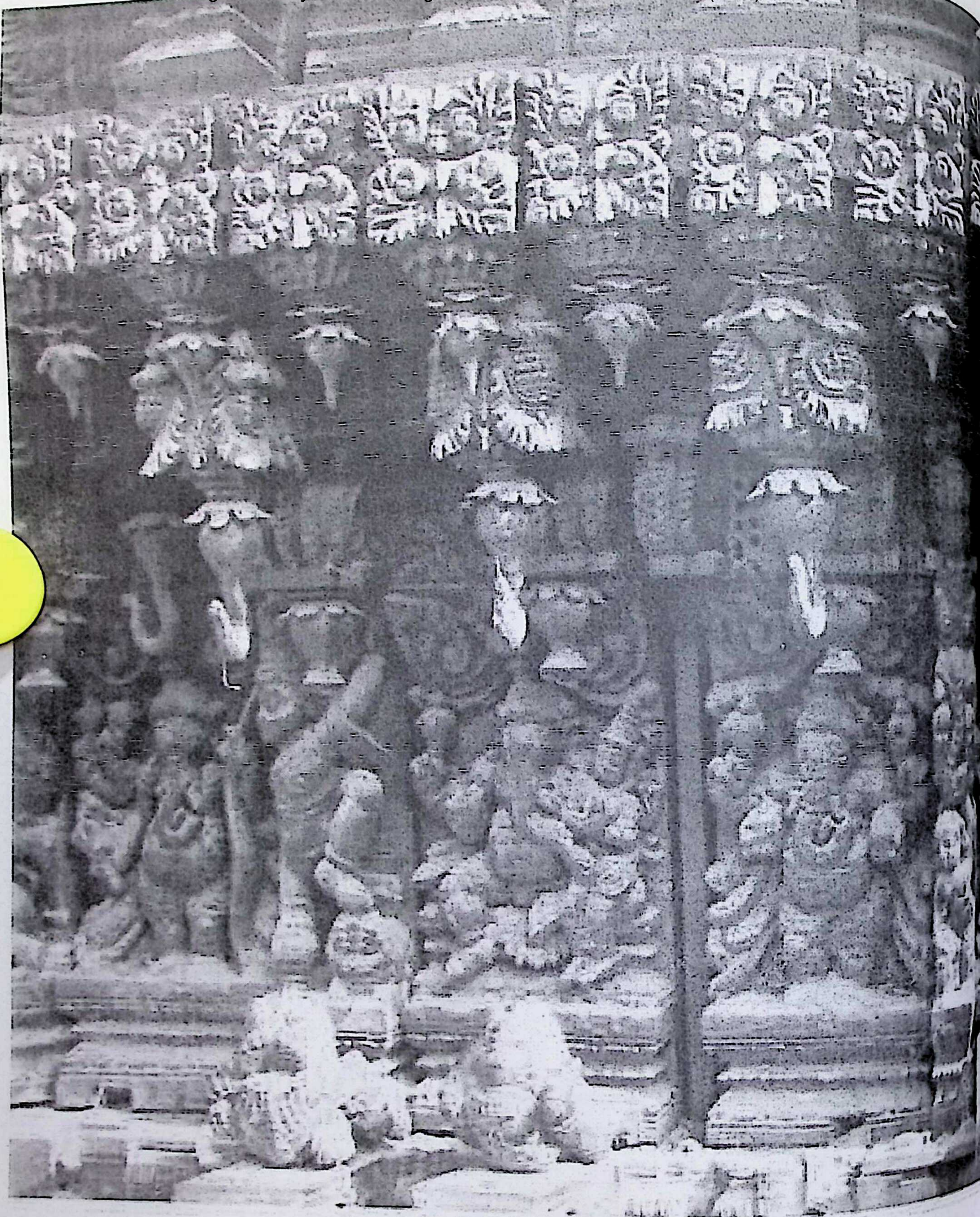
vakratuṇḍa mahākāya sūryakoṭisamaprabha|
nirvighnaṃ kuru me deva sarvakāryeṣu sarvadā||

O Lord, the curved trunk, large body and with the brilliance of million Suns, always make all my works free from obstacles.

प्रणम्य शिरसा देवं गौरीपुत्रं विनायकम् ।
भक्तावासं स्मरेन्नित्यम् आयुष्कामार्थसिद्धये ॥

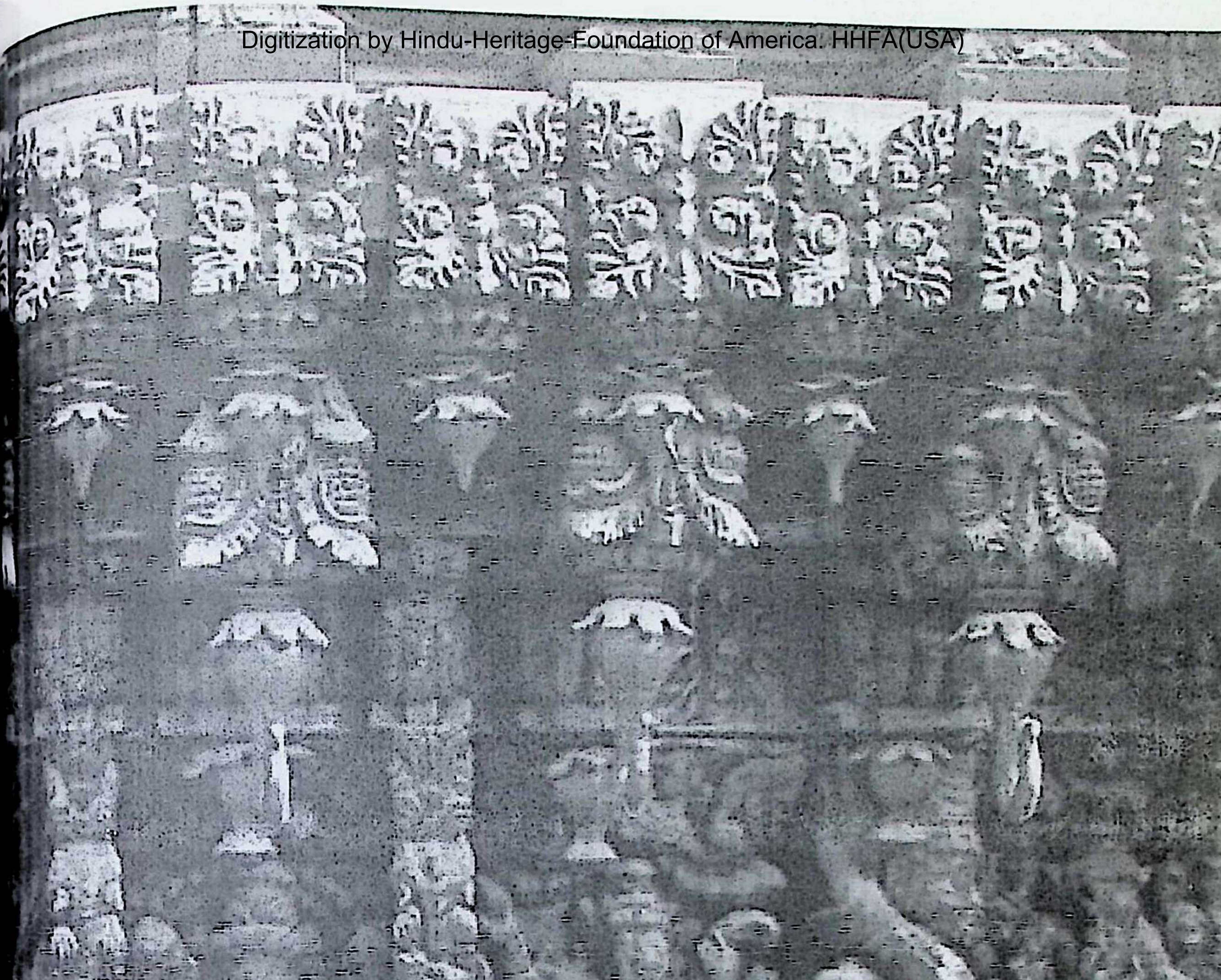
pranamya śirasā devaṃ gaurīputraṃ vināyakam|
bhaktāvāsaṃ smarennityaṃ āyuṣkāmārthasiddhaye||

Bowing with the head, to the divine, to the son-of-Parvati, to the Vinayaka, to the devotee-dweller, remember daily, for the accomplishment of long life, desires and wealth.



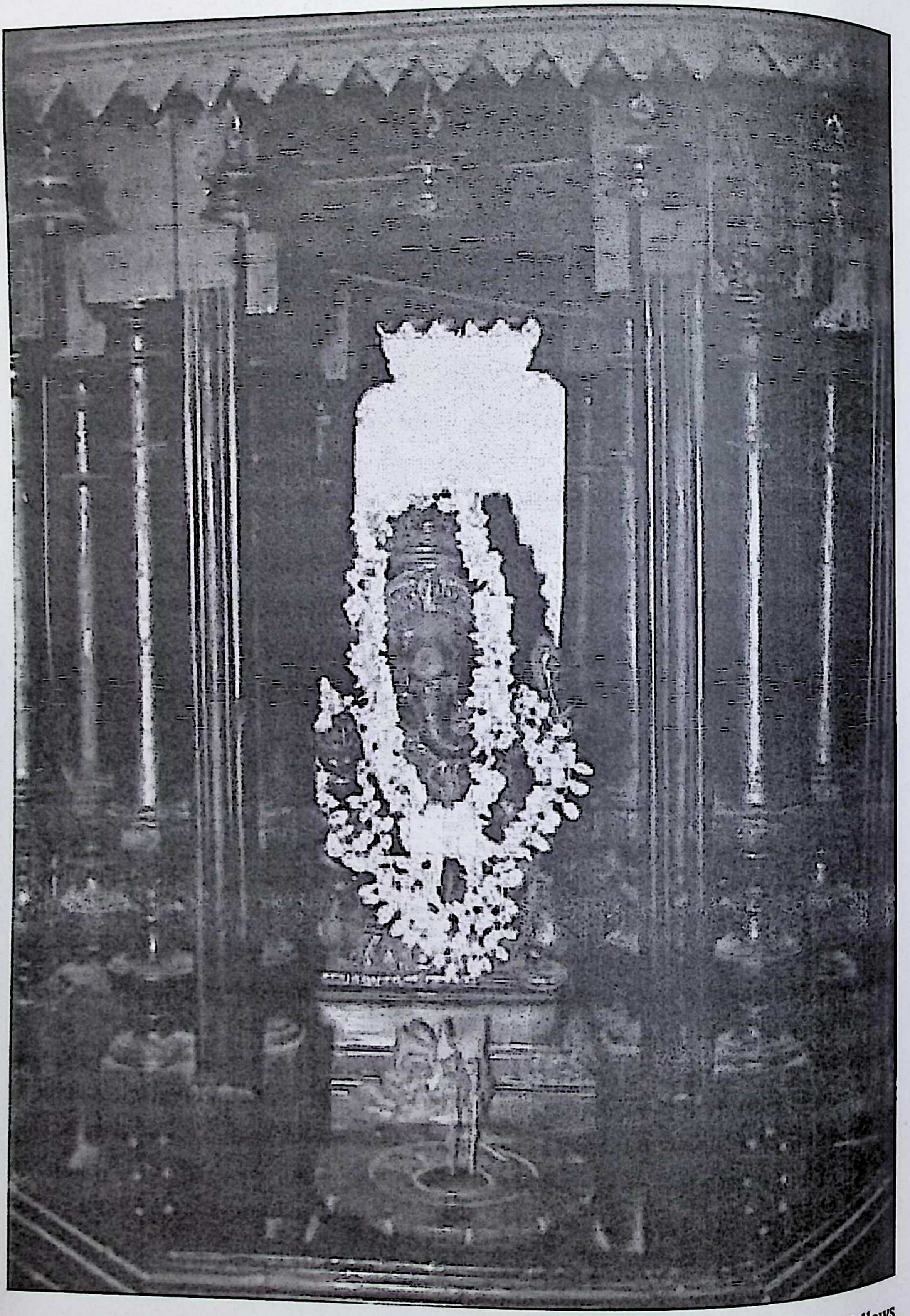
The Vinayaga Panel

A panel from of the Vinayaga devaratham of the Villianur in Pondicherry showing the many forms of Vignaraja. In the first figure he is Veera Vinayaga standing with many hands holding many weapons ready to wage war, the second is Uchista Vinayaga seated with her beloved on his left lap and his proboscis pointed towards her yoni, next he is benevolent holding the conch and disc in the back hands;



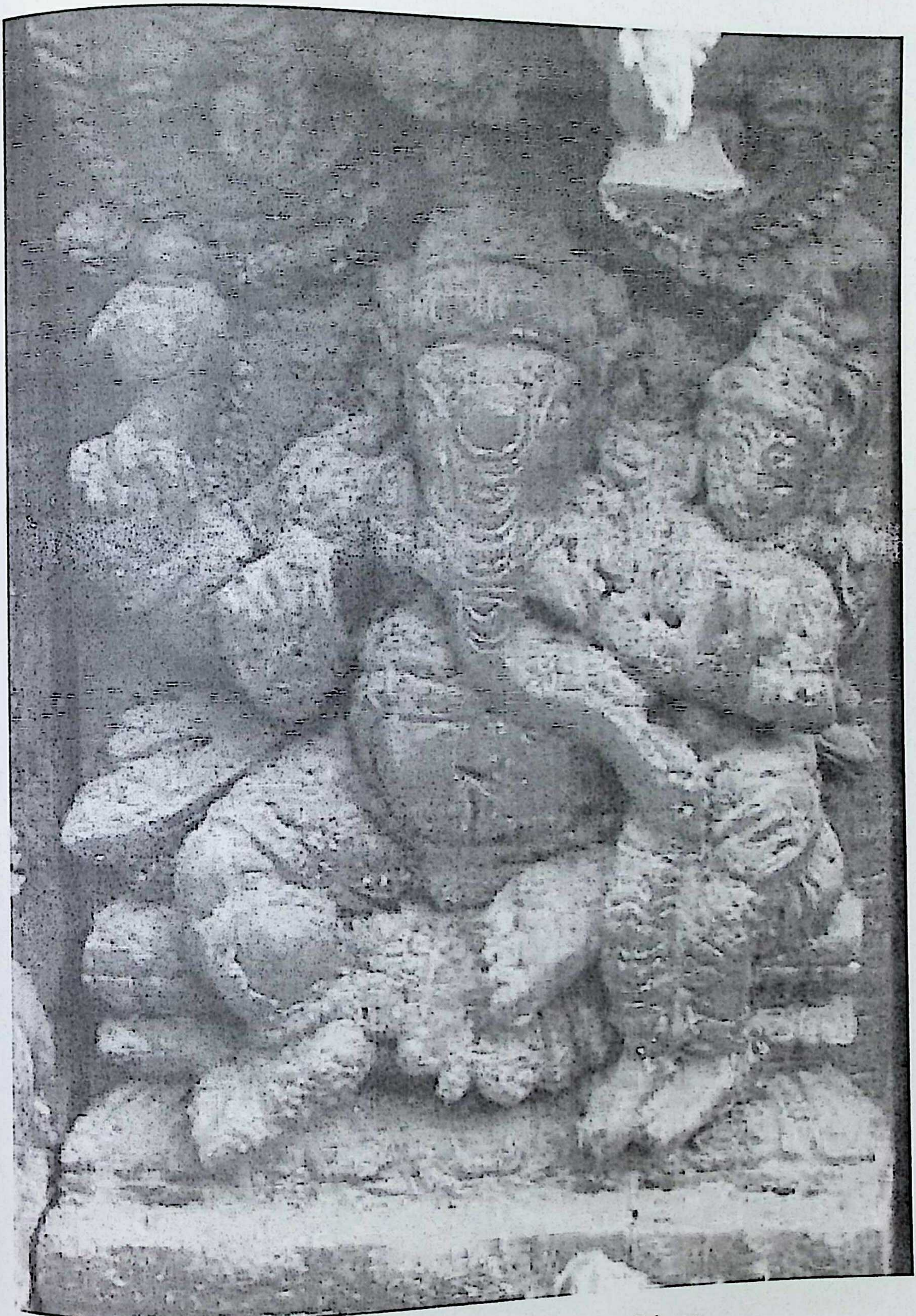
abhaya and varada mudra in the front hands. In the centre he is holding a bow and arrow, next he is holding a stick and a kamandalu like as ascetic, next he is seen to have six arms holding many weapons and in the last he is seated with Buddhi and Siddhi on his sides.

This world was not built with random bricks of Chance,



The Vinayaga ratham at a hotel in chennai. It is a small model complete in all respects and follows all the principles laid in the scriptures. It is worshiped daily.

The great world-rhythms were heart-beats of one Soul,

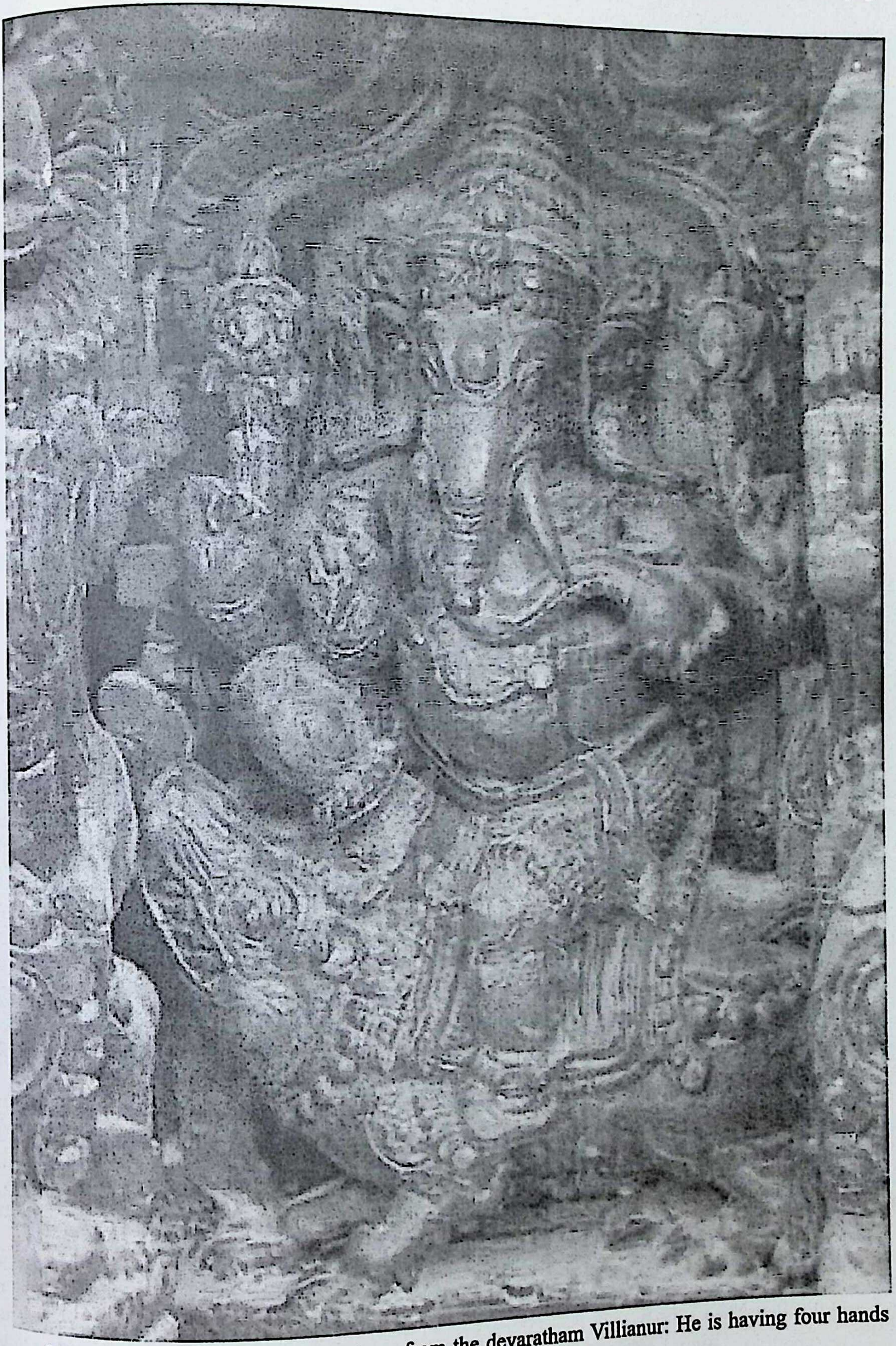


Uthchista Vinayaga from the Vinayaga devarathamm at Villianur, Pondicherry

Life's steps a stumbling series without suit,

Utshava Murti of Vinayaga decorated and placed on the ratham for the rathyatra at Pondicherry.

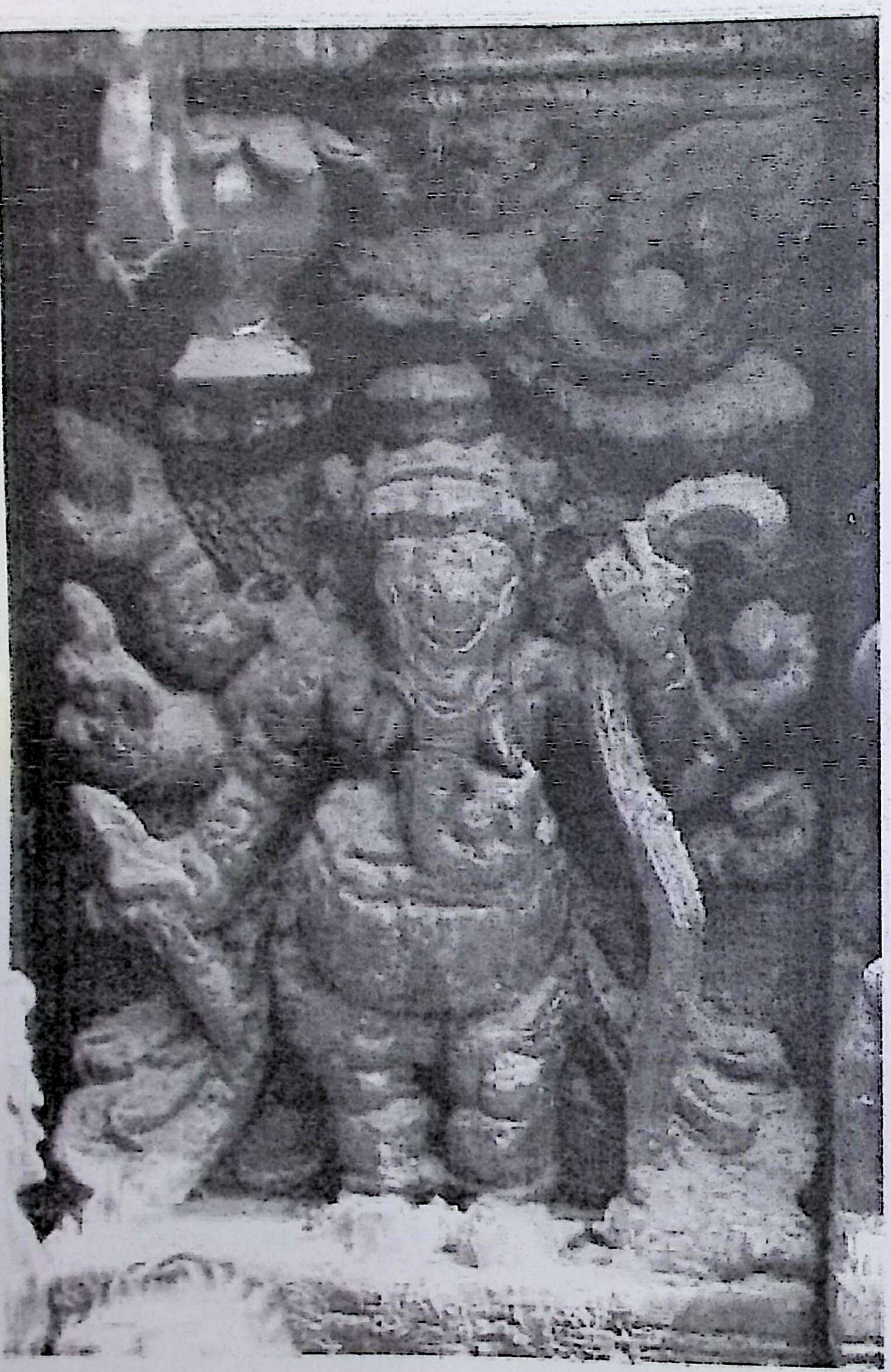
Bearing the eternity of every spirit.



Vinayaga on Mooshika (ram) vahana from the devaratham Villianur: He is having four hands holding the divine conch, disc, a modoka and a ankusha.

Immense like ocean, the creation's load

VINAYAGA RATHAM VILLIANUR PONDICHERRY

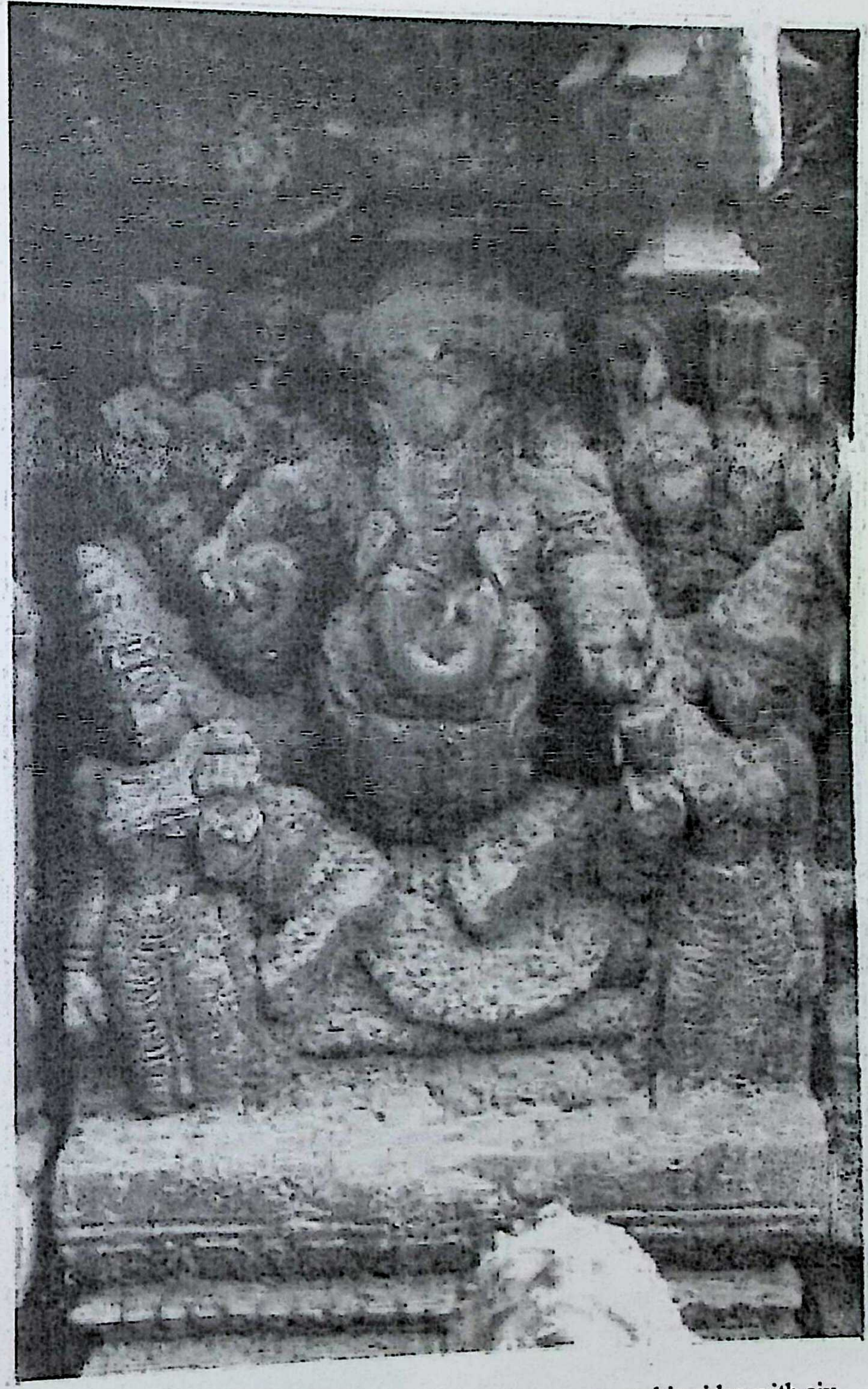


Vinayaga has six hands holding a bow , modaka and pustak on the left hands and the right hands holding the arrow, stylet and coconut respectively. He is standing in samabhanaga.

Or grow into the God-Light and God-Force

Vinayaga as Ganapati is warrior and chief of the shiva ganas is holding bow and arrow, lotus, disc and other things which are not very clear, but he is ashtabhuja (eight handed).

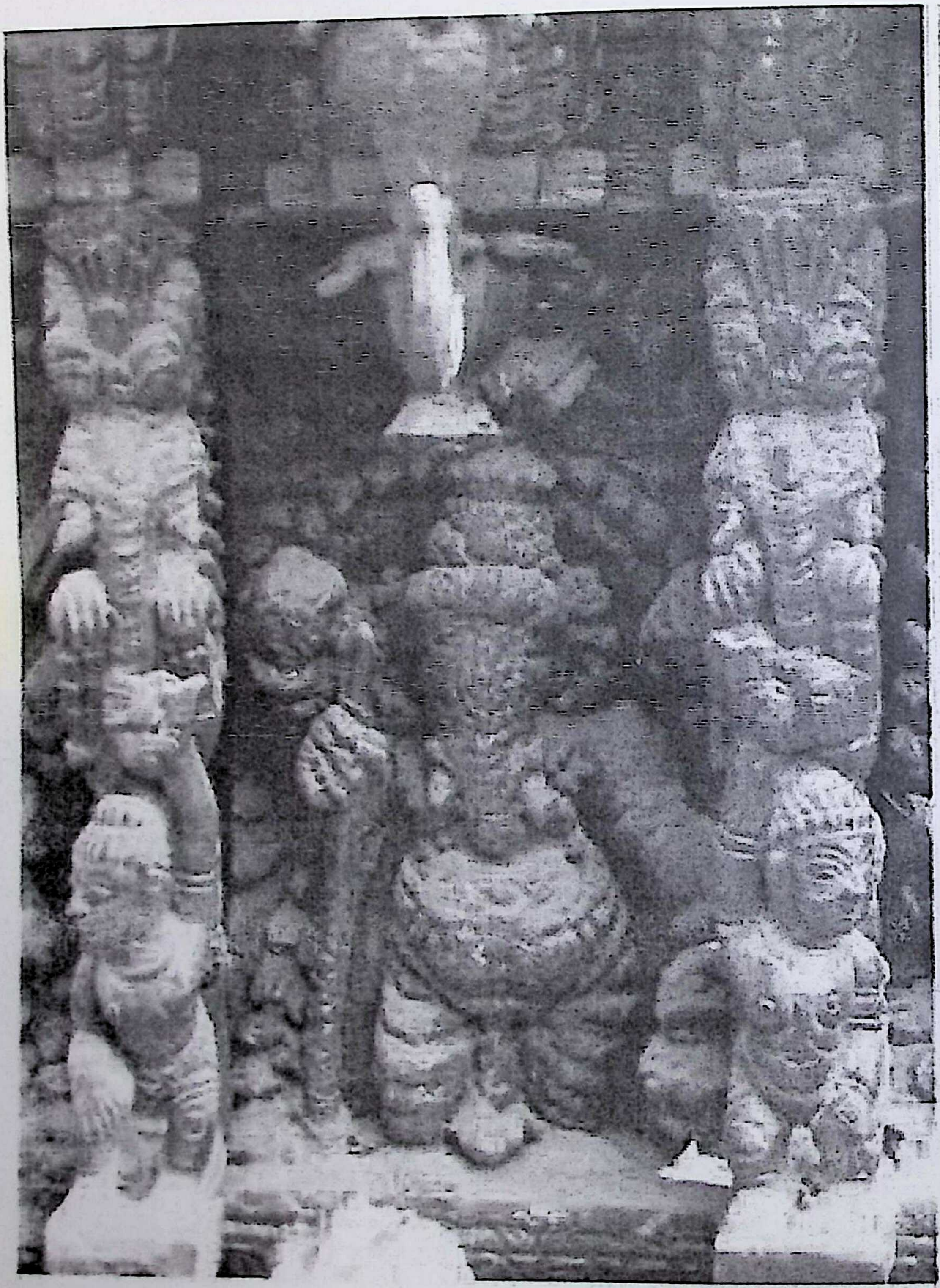
The breath of infinitudes not yet revealed,



Shiddhi, Buddhi Vinayaga is seen with his consorts on his sides with six hands holding disc, arrow etc and abhaya mudra.

A revelation stir the nature's depths;

VINAYAGA RATHAM VILLIANUR PONDICHERRY

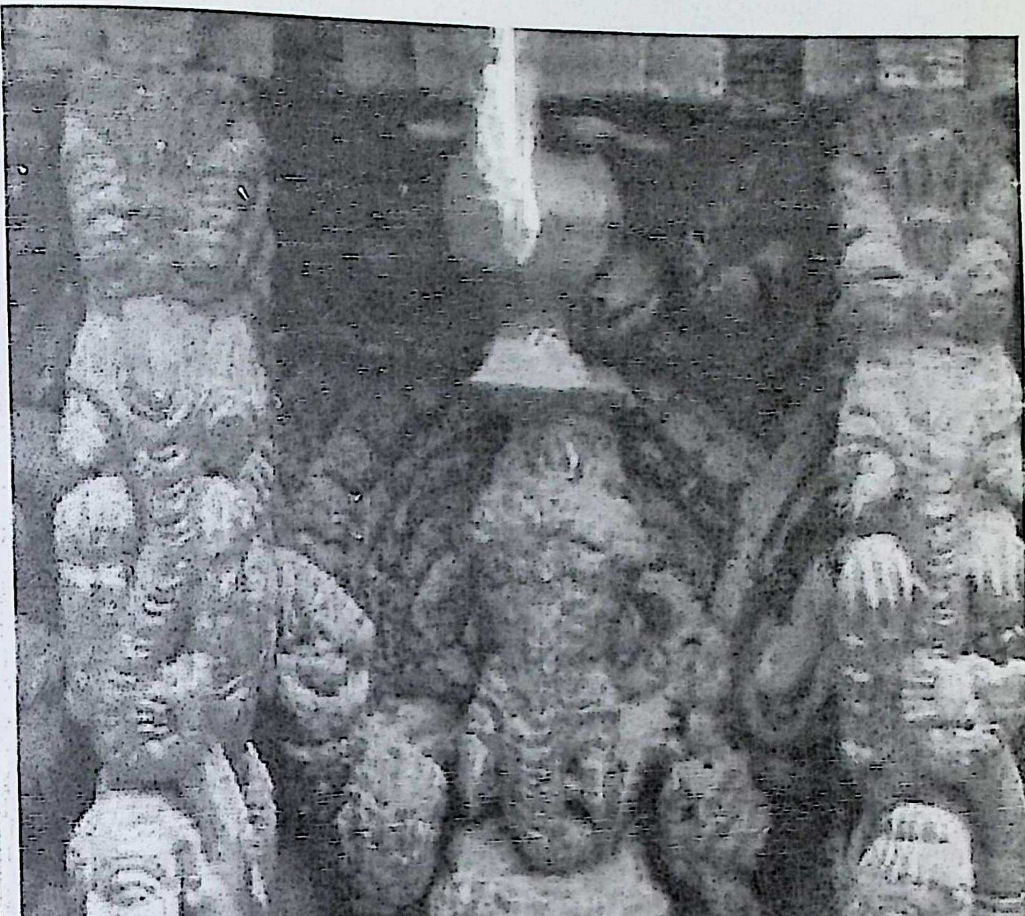


In that immobile and immutable realm

Emerging on the edge

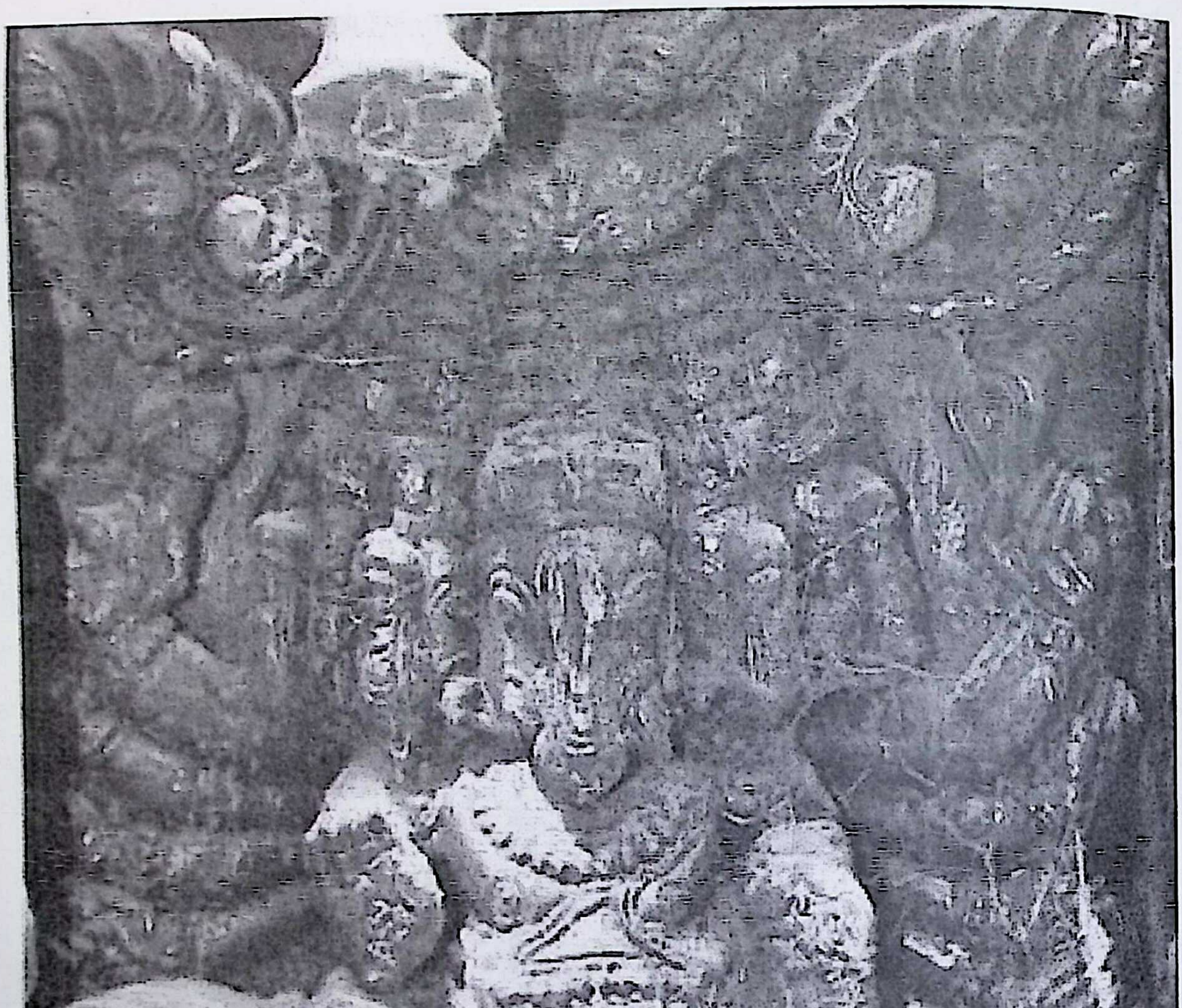
Many forms of vinayaga has been depicted by the artist in the small devaratham dedicated to Lord Vinayaga at the Thirukameswara Kovil . On the left he is holding a stick and a kamandalu or small pitcher to hold holy water to show he is an Bhamachari. In the centre he is seen to hold two lotus in his

of unseen worlds.



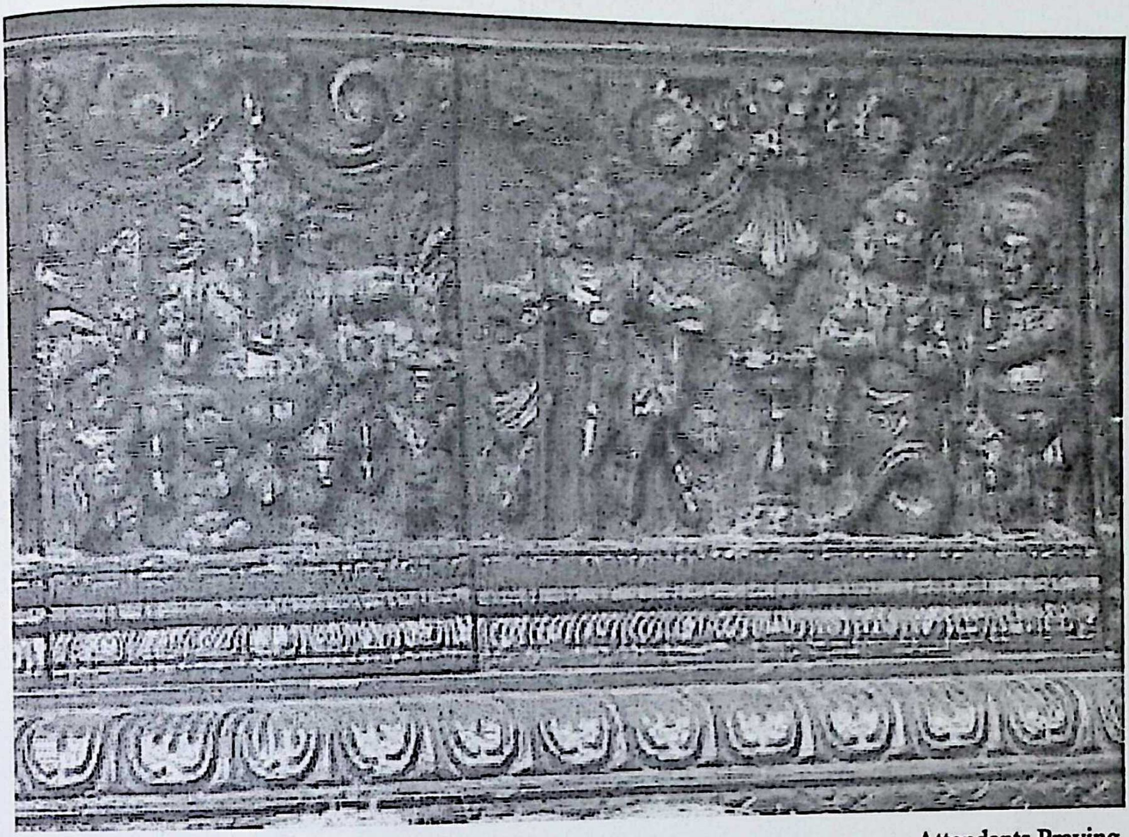
There is the stable force of all that moves;

back hands and varada mudra on the right and holding modaka in the left hand. In the right Vinayaga is shown to hold the bow and arrow. All along decorative yali are seen between the panels.



Pancha mookha Vinayaga : Five faced vinayaga with ten arms holding many weapons and seated on shimhasana.

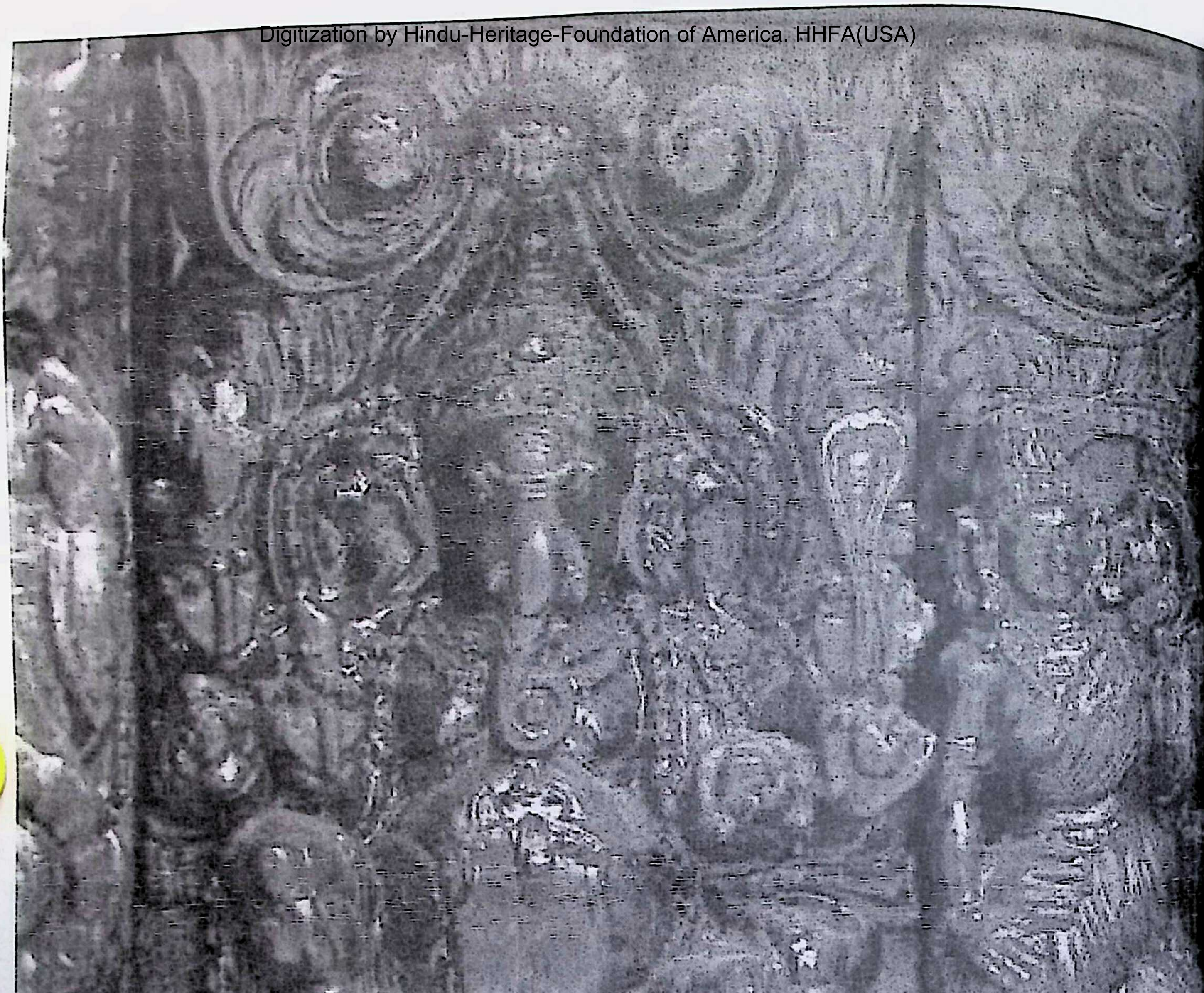
Lost in the spirit's wide identity.



Attendants Praying

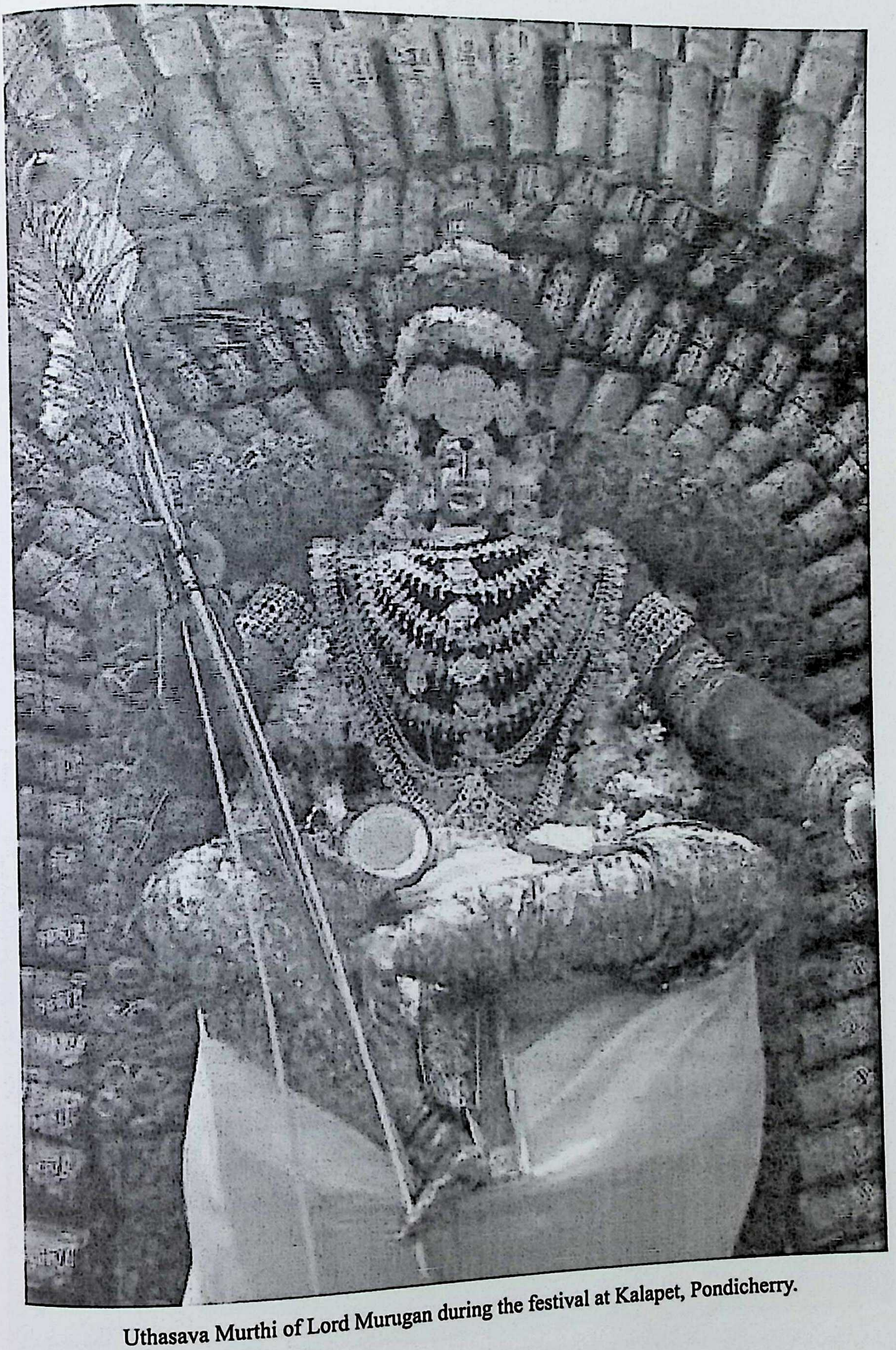
Nadana Vinayaga

Vinayaga seated



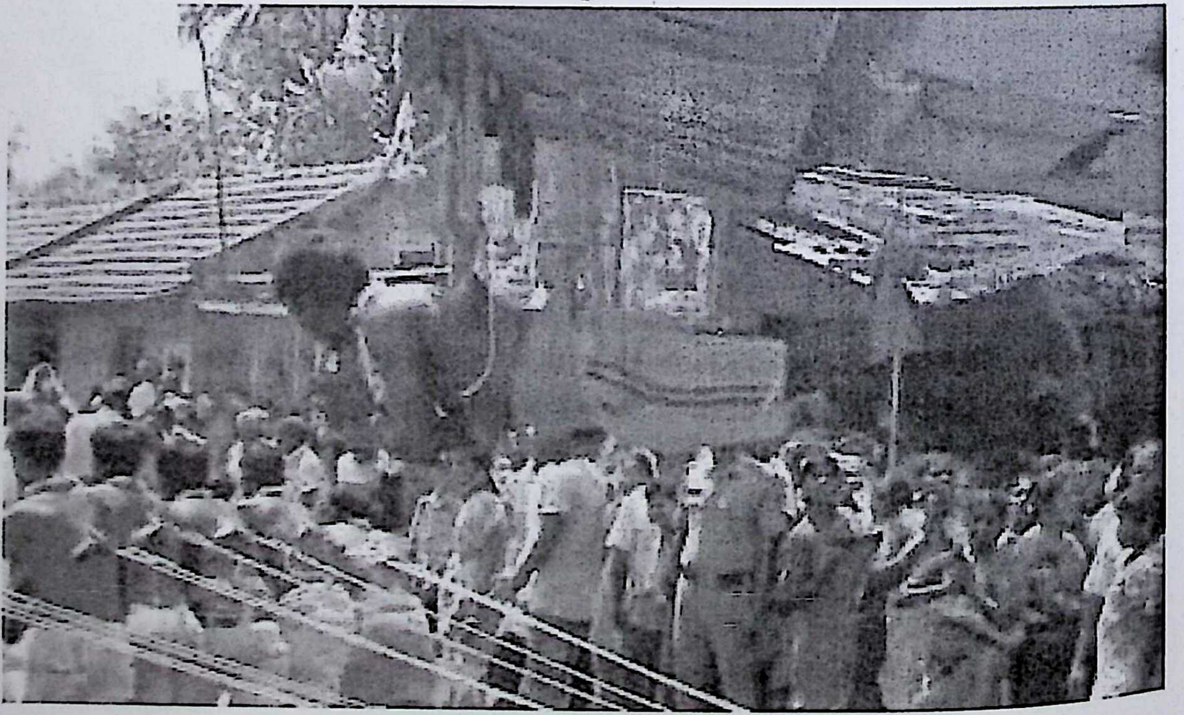
Vinayaga with Riddhi and Siddhi in the middle

Vinayaga on his Moosika vahana



Uthasava Murthi of Lord Murugan during the festival at Kalapet, Pondicherry.

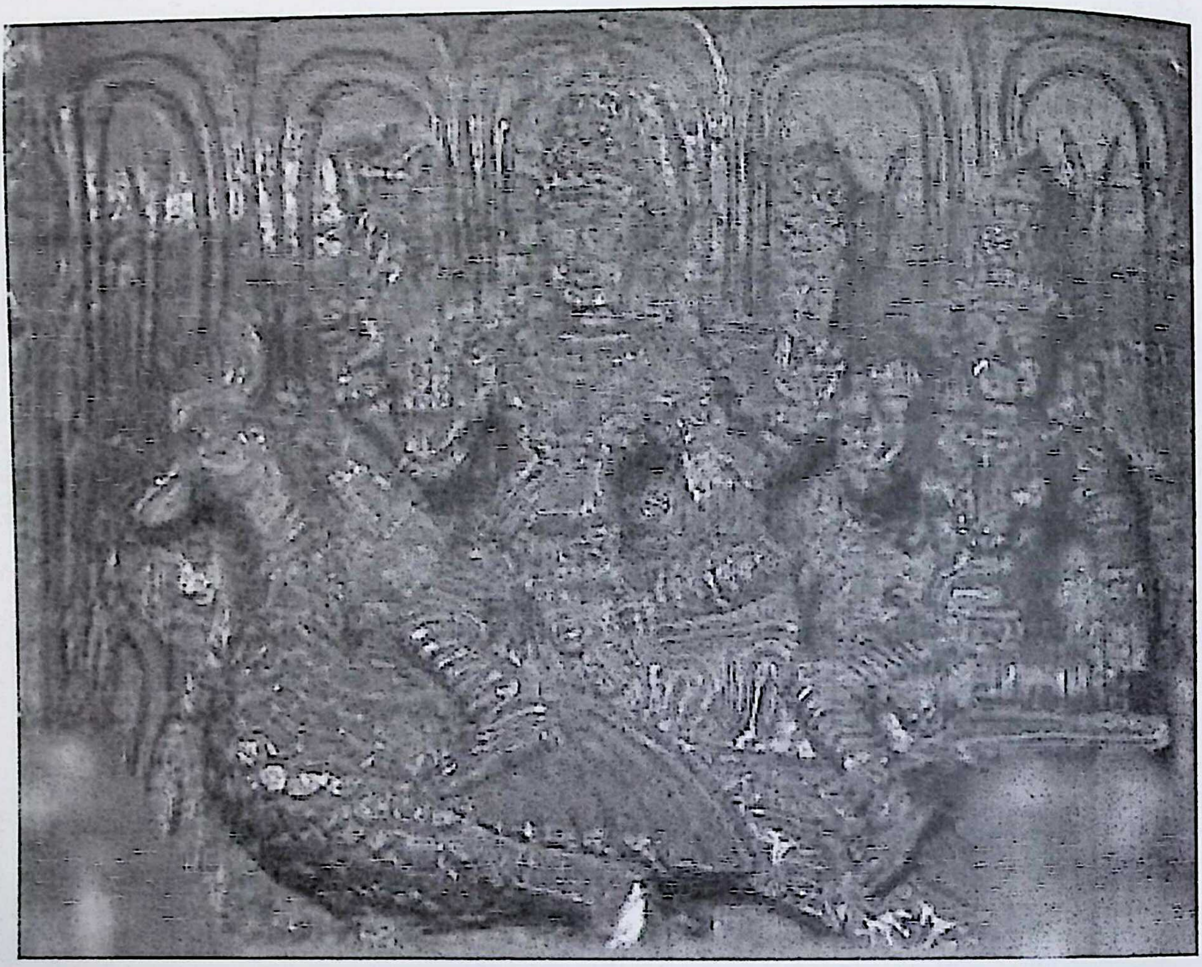
Murugan on the peacock vahana



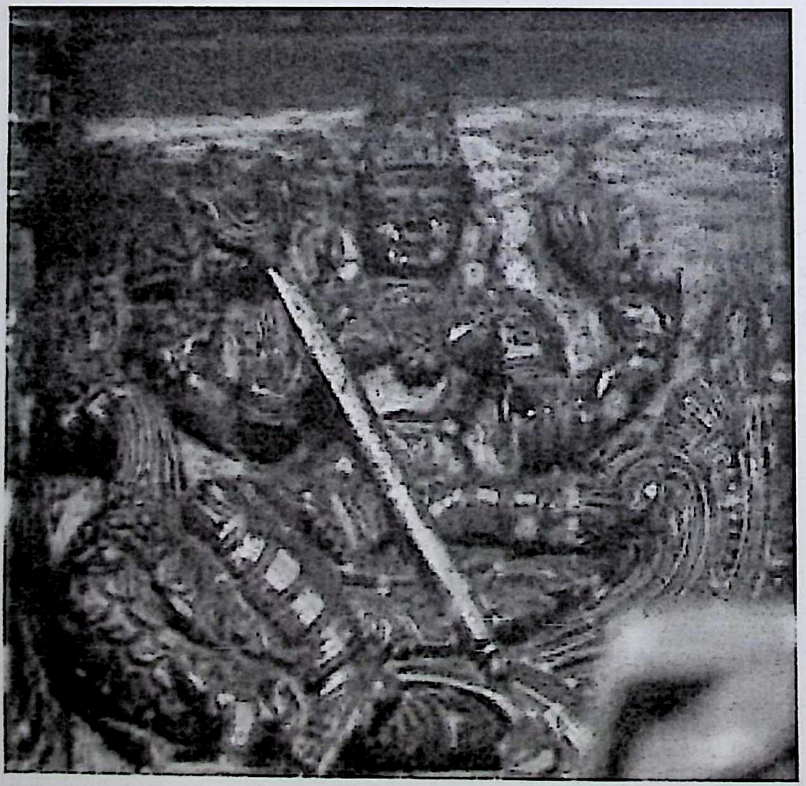
Devotee undergoing austerity to please Lord Murugan

Murugan on the peacock vahana from the davaratham at Kalapet, Pondicherry

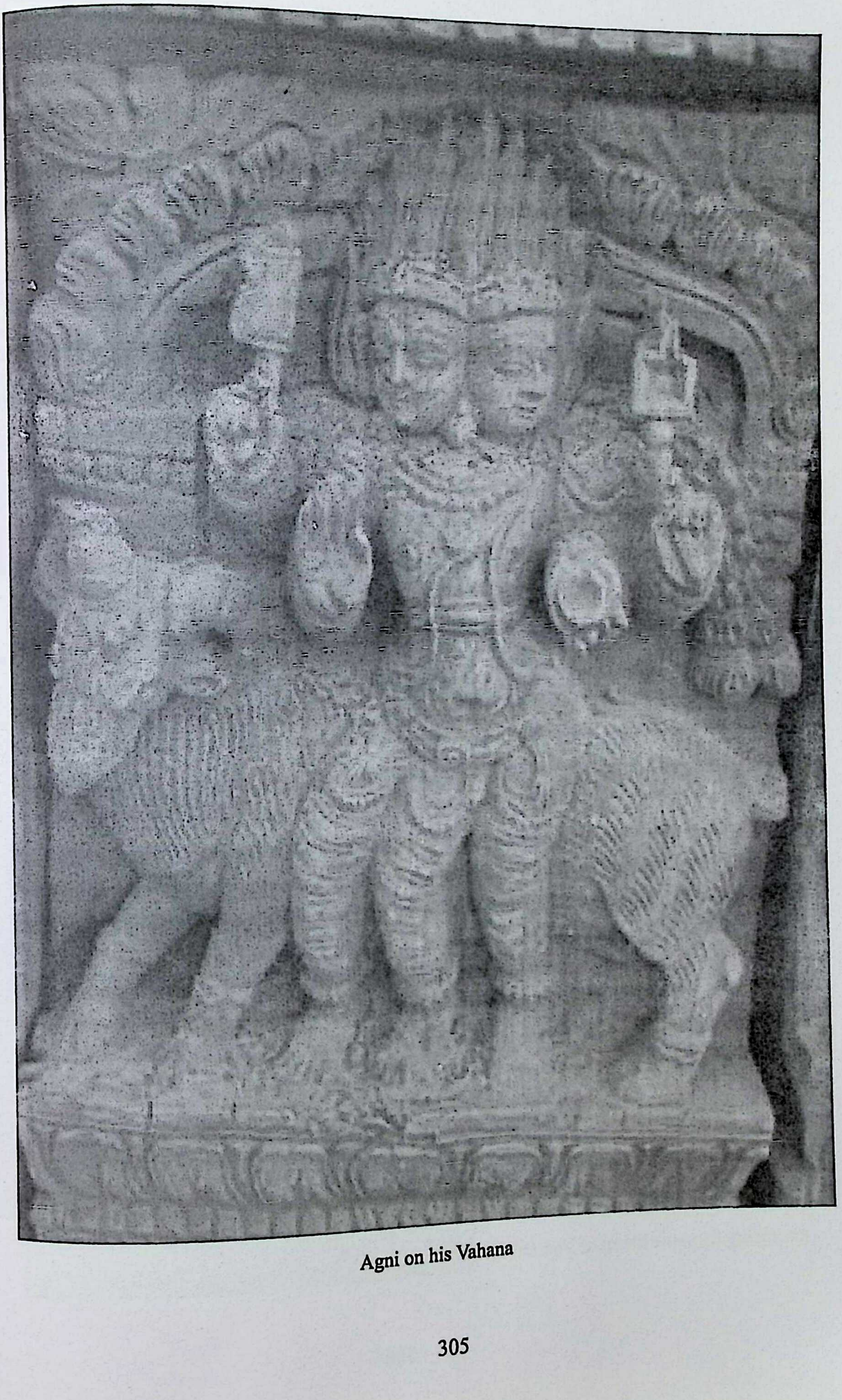
Lord Vinayaga & Lord Murugan are worshiping the Siva Lingam



Lord Murugan with his consort Devi Valliammal



Lord Murugan seated on peacock vahana holding the Trident, Damuru, Ankusha, Bowl & Abhaya Mudra



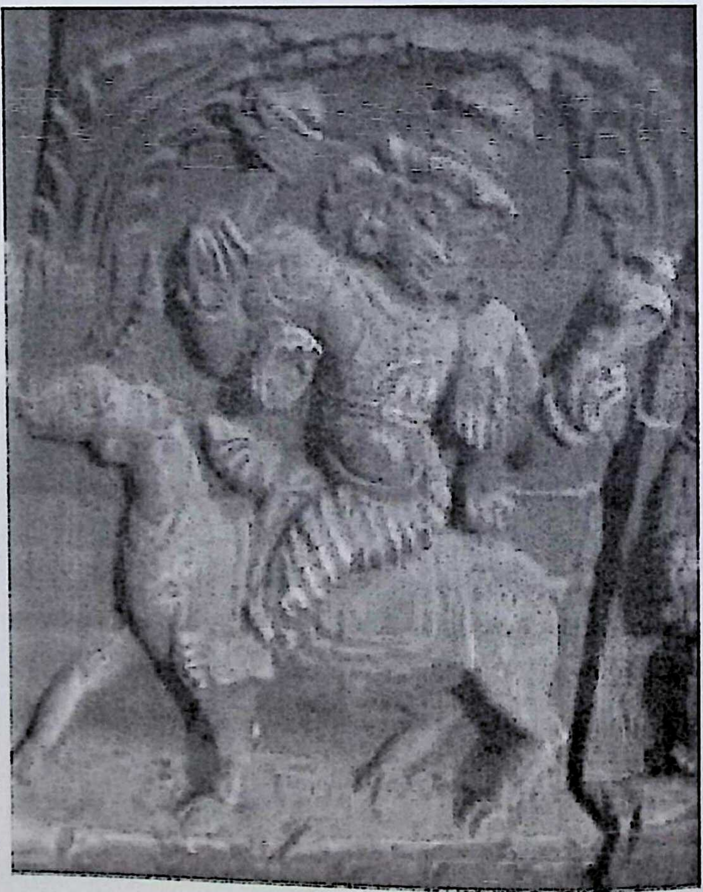
Agni on his Vahana

Chapter -13

Other Gods and Goddess

Brahma the creator

Brahma was created by lord Vishnu and is supposed to have taken birth from his shoulder. He has four faces in all the four directions hence is called as Chaturmukha. As he sits on the lotus that is seen emerging out of the nabhi of Sri Vishnu, he is called as Padmaja and Kamalasena. He is also the father of all living creatures hence is known as "Prajapati" and "Pitamaha" (the great Patriarch). He is born out of the golden egg hence is called as "Hiranyagrabha". He is the husband of Savitri and hence is called "Savitripati". He is always seated in the front of the temple ratham on a separate pedestal or platform. He holds the reins of the temple ratham symbolically by holding the rein of the horses attached to it. He holds the Kamandalu (holy water jug), rosary (aksamala), srunk or sacrificial ladle and spoon (srura). He may be present separately along with Saraswati playing the veena. He is present in many of the Urdhavatandava murthi panel, sitting as a judge in the dancing duet between Parvati as Kali and Shiva. The Shilparatna stipulates that Brahma should have a long beard, wear ratnakundala, draped in deer hide and ride a swan or be seated on a lotus. Lord Brahma must have ten or twelve hands in the Vidi-brahma form. He is usually seated in Sukhasana. In the Anantasayana Vishnu form Brahma is seated on a lotus emerging from the nabhi of Vishnu.



Agni on his Vahana -

Naga and Nagakanyas

The naga and nagakanya (male and female) snakes respectively are usually present in most of the Shiva temples as guardians of the temple. They also bestow wealth and prosperity to people who worship them. Most of them have the lower half as the body of a snake and upper half as that of a man or a woman. Nagas are also considered as source of fertility. The Kundalini Shakti is symbolically presented as a snake. The snake Ananta seshaya or Adishesha forms the seat for the lord Vishnu in his eternal abode of Vaikuntha floating on the cosmic ocean. Vasuki is another snake used as a rope to tie the mount Meru and use it to churn the ocean of milk by the gods and asuras, Vasuki is shown in the Samudramanthan panels in the temple cars. Vasuki also is seen as a beautiful female with five hoods just above the base of the temple car and her legs protruding from behind the car. She is symbolically holding the entire temple car by her coils and prevents the disintegration of the car during its journey of rathayatra. "Kaliya" is another snake seen in temple cars with Sri Krishna standing on its head in classic tribhanga posture. Shiva is seen to always wear a snake around his neck; hence all his presentation in the temple ratham will have a snake like a garland. It only represents his complete mastery over the Kundalini Shakti and all the sense organs. The other form in which snakes are represented in the panels include the snake charmer, eagle eating a snake, etc. The other snakes seen are Akaka, Karkotaka, Padma (Abja) Matapadma (Mahabhuja) and Sankalpa. Another important snake is the Adishesha, the snake on which Lord Vishnu is seen to rest or seated floating on the primordial ocean.

Astapalas

These are guardians of the eight directions, Indra for east, Yama for south, Varuna for west, Kubera for north and Agni for southeast, Nairuthi for southwest, Vayu for North west and Isana for north east respectively. Most of these directions had very important place in the Vedic time and with the advent of the Puranas and Upanishads at a later date they were no longer considered important.

Indra

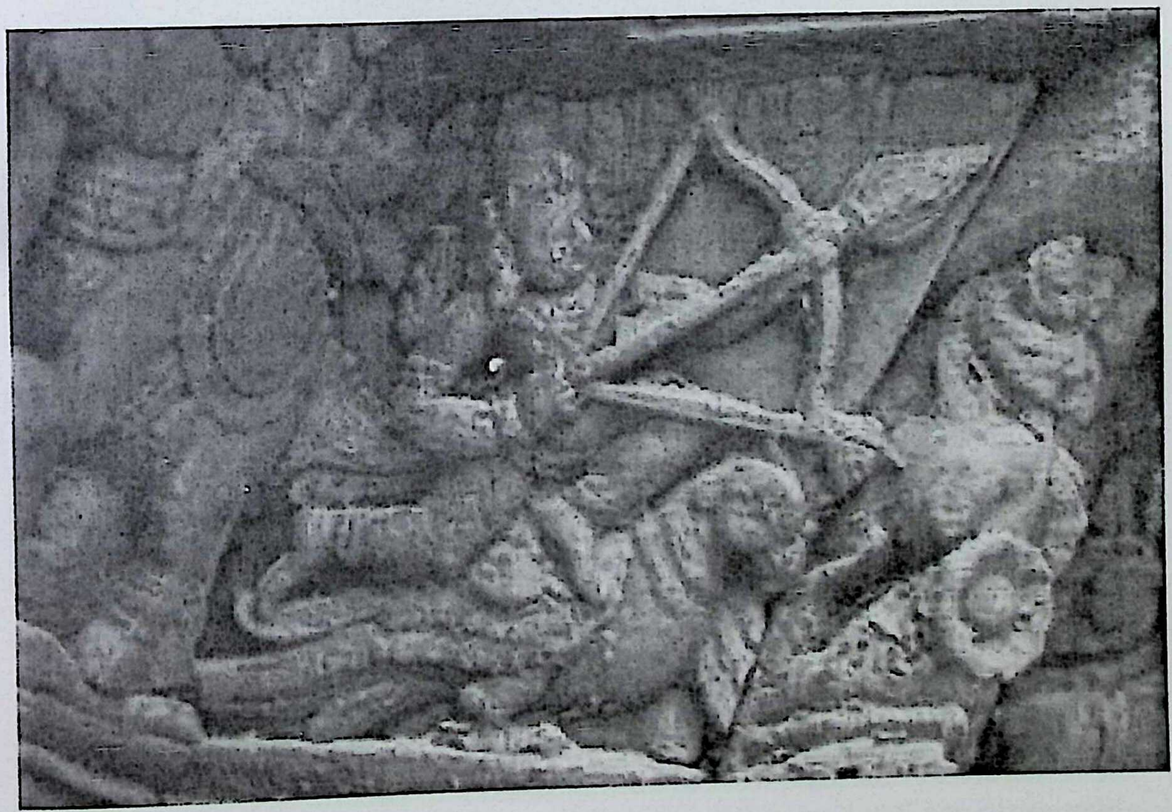
Indra is the king of heavens or swarga. His vahana is the elephant king Ariyavata. He always carries the thunder bolt or Vajra and is also the Lord over rain and water. He is the lord over the senses. To be able to conquer him is to conquer our own senses and he symbolises that the fact one can go beyond the outer senses then one can be "Indrajaya", and reach heaven or swarga.

Agni

Agni literary mean fire and is usually seated on the ram or goat. He is shown to have two heads and is seated on a bhadrapitha, he holds the snake, trident, lotus and fire. He represents both the aspiration of man as well as the fire which is needed to destroy the old so the new may be born. Hence Agni is held by Shiva in the form of Nataraja, so that he creates new by destroying the old.

Mithuna figures in the ratham

It is an interesting observation that all the temple cars have at least few Mithuna figures carved in them. The Mithuna figures can be described in a simple way as the physical intimacy of the male and female forms. They can be also called as erotic figures. They are drawn from the great treatise on the art of love called as "Kamasutra" written by Vastayana. These figures are usually present in the niches and corners of the temple car. They are present in all the four corners of the temple car. Usually hidden from the surface, hence a casual look may not be enough to find them in the temple car. They are present at the second and third tier of the temple car. The sexual union of the man and woman is depicted in various forms. The simple forms are embracing by the lovers, fondling each other and lovers kissing each other. Some of the figures include highly acrobatic postures of love making, which appear to be physically impossible. In some of the temple cars the various forms of sexual practices like bestiality, yoni-cult, cullingness, fellatio etc are also shown. Some of the popular figures include the man licking and drinking some fluid coming out from between the legs of the lady. Figures of the lady

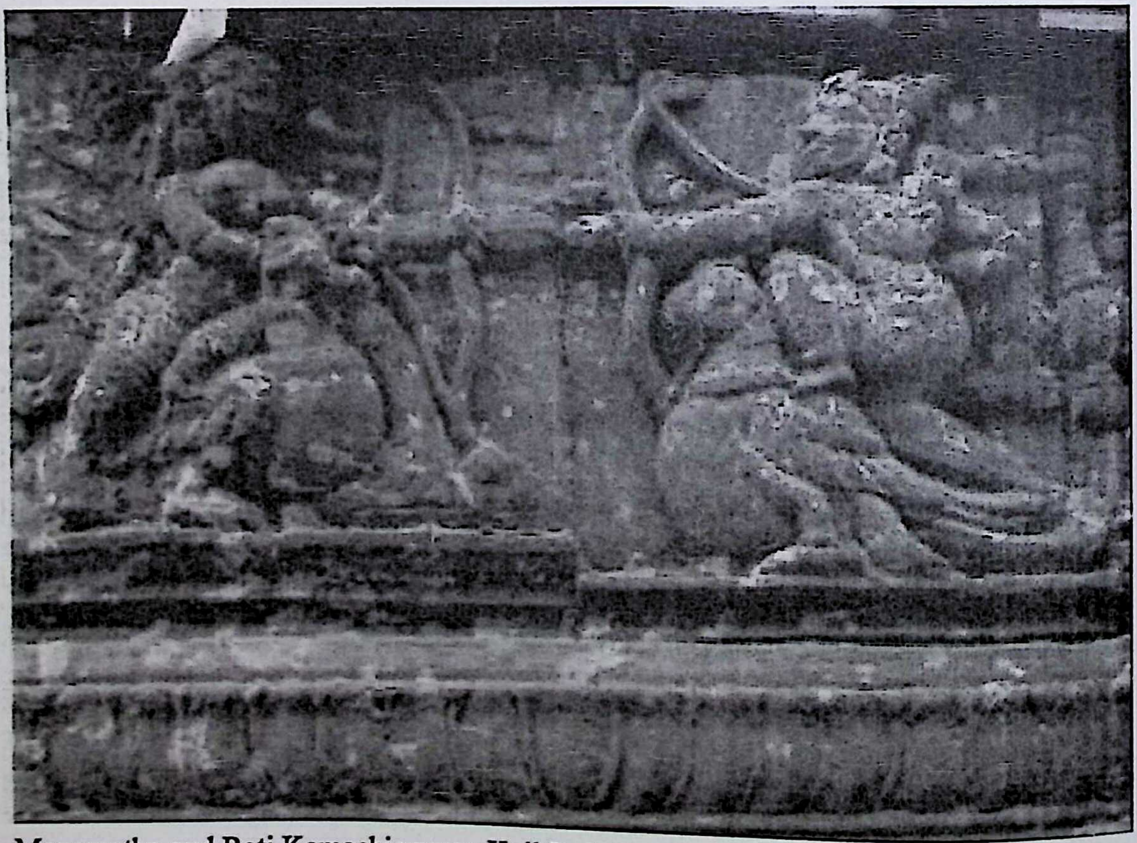


Rati on parrot, Chidambaram devaratham.

Earth could not hide from me the powers she veils:

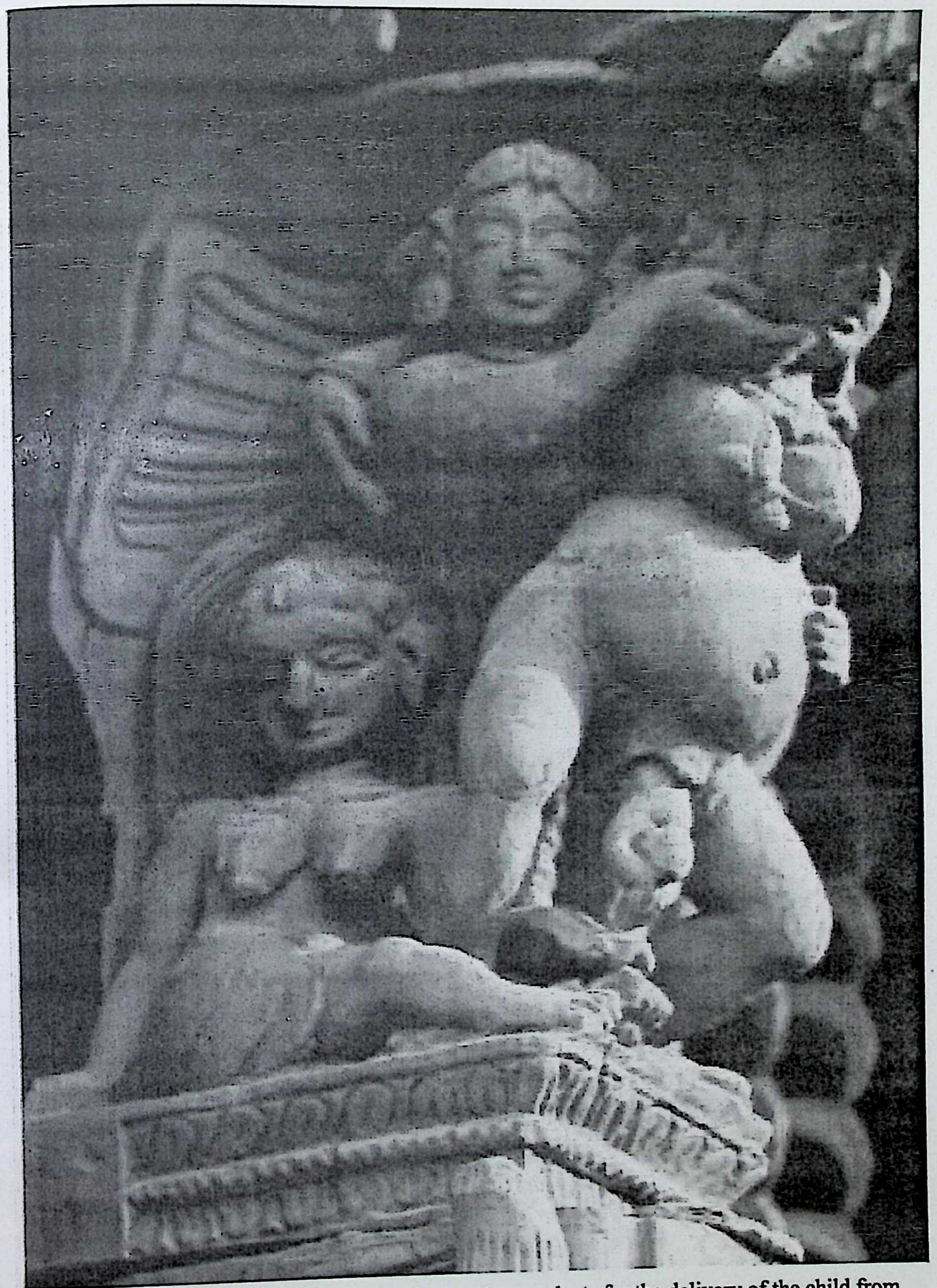
having her bath in nude are shown with men near by. In some a dwarf man is seen to appear to pull the dress of the lady while she is taking her bath. This may be called as Voyeurism. Sometimes one lady is seen with two or more lovers. The practice of "Yoni-cult" is also shown in the temple cars, where the man's face appears to be buried between the legs of the lady as if drinking the fluid emerging out from between the legs of the lady – the snake representing the lower Kundalini Shakti. A male may be seen below with a musical instrument (trumpet like), blowing it to entice the snake out just like a snake charmer. A very popular presentation in temple car is that of "delivery of a child". Here the pregnant mother is seen to strain along with female attendants helping her; the baby is seen to be coming out.

There are several explanations given by different people to the presence of the erotic or Mithuna figures in the temple cars. It is known that humans have a family and children. Hence it forms part of normal activities of man. The various social activities of man have evolved over centuries from the Vedic times to the present times. There is need to present them in the temple



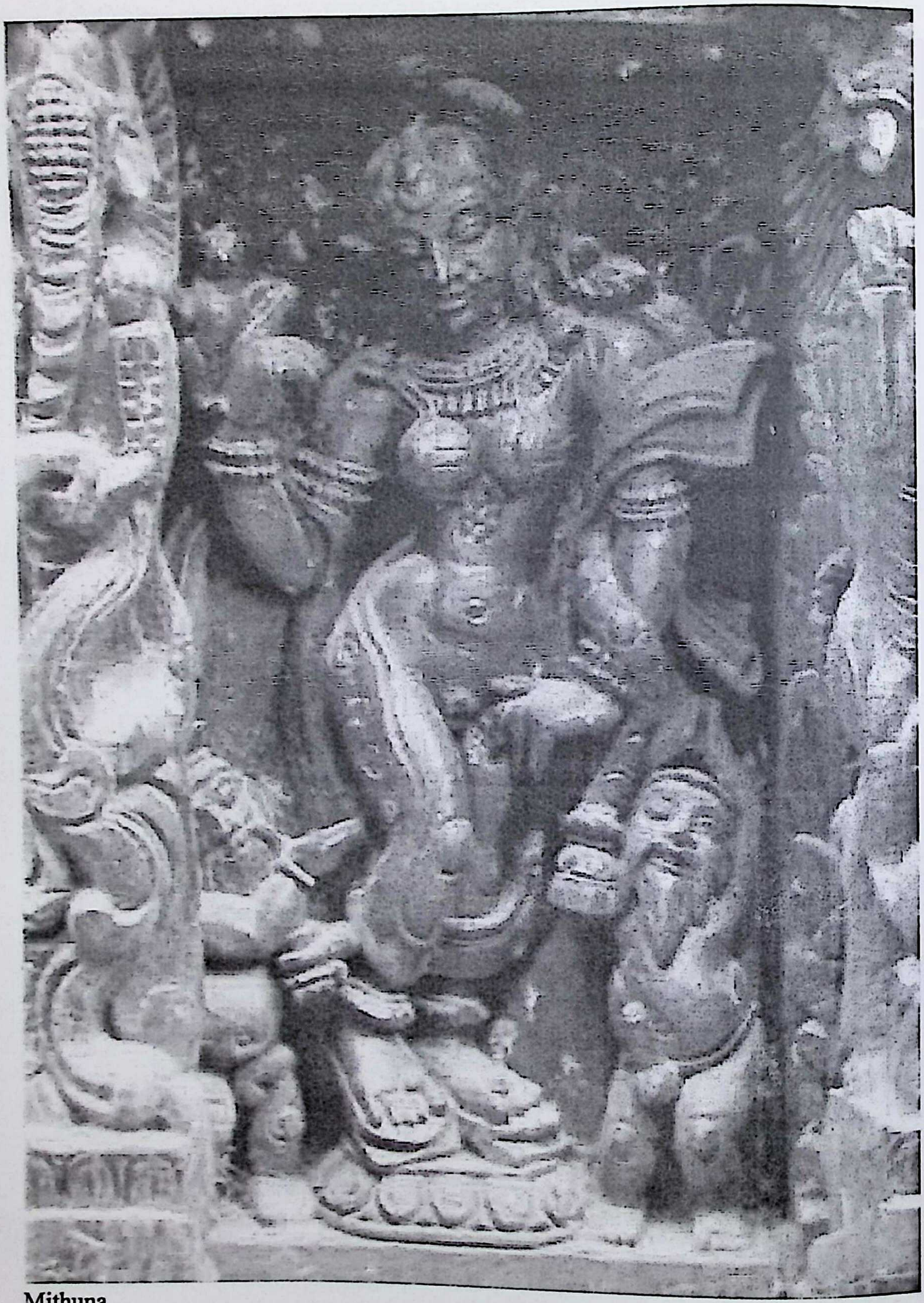
Manamatha and Rati Kamachiamman Koil Puducherry

Yet in the heart their secret conscious selve



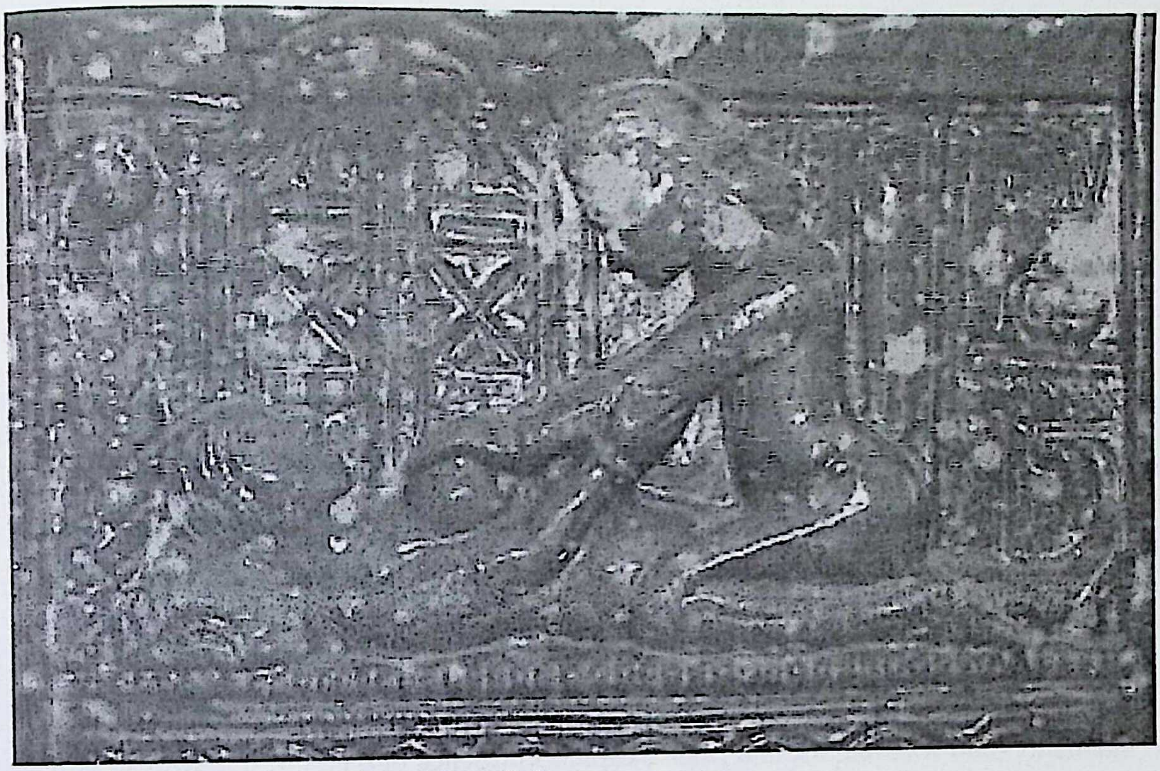
Delivery of a child , mother helped by the female attendents for the delivery of the child from the devaratham at Veerapatinam, Puducherry

I have heard strange voices cross the ether's waves,

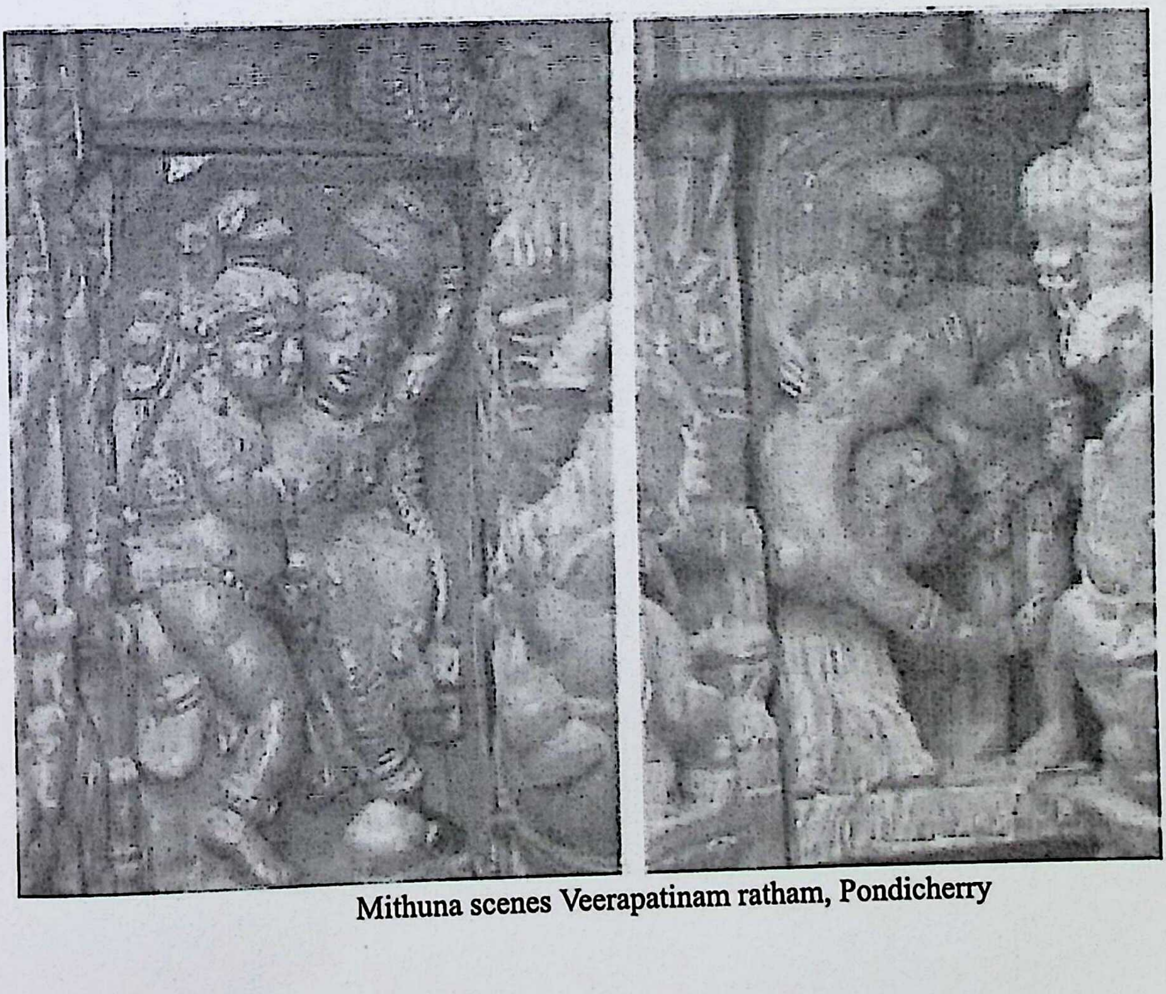


Mithuna

The mystery of God's birth and acts remains



Mithuna : Shiva ratham MG road Pondicherry

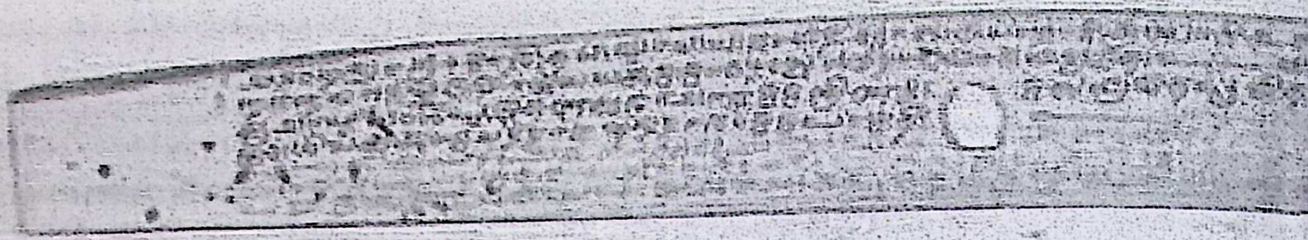


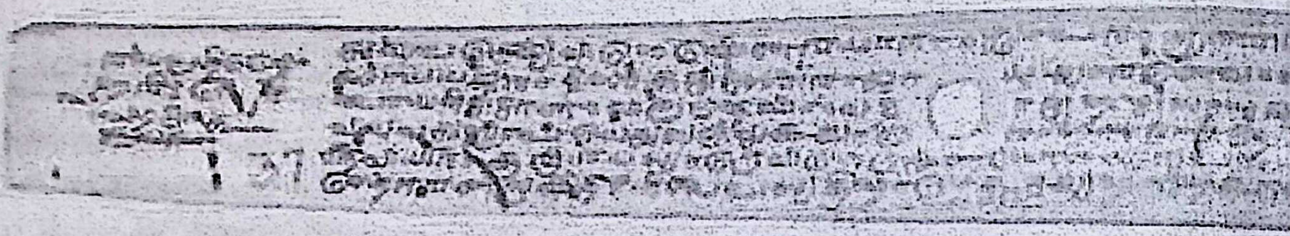
Mithuna scenes Veerapatinam ratham, Pondicherry cars and hence these figures form part of these activities. Some say that these figures ward of evil eye, prevent the disintegration of the

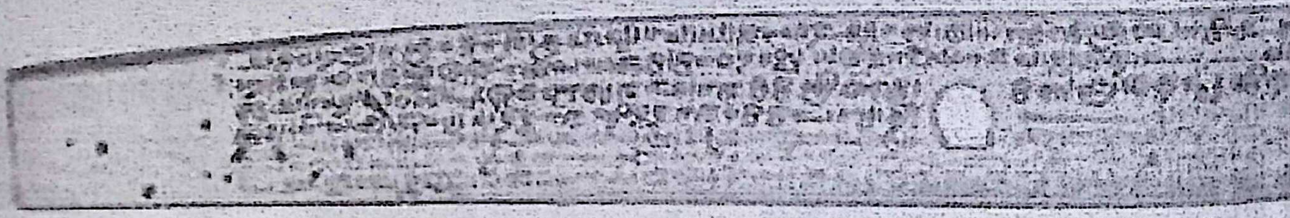
car from natural calamities like thunder, rain, storm, lighting, etc. Some say these form a good method of sex education to the public. Some propose that these have originated from the sexual practices done by the tantriks in the post Vedic era. The tantriks are supposed to practice various sexual orgies along with other practices, hence the presence of rishis in these panels. Some of the bizarre and acrobatic postures also can be explained by this theory. This can also explain presence of panels which are otherwise strictly prohibited by the "Kamasutra".

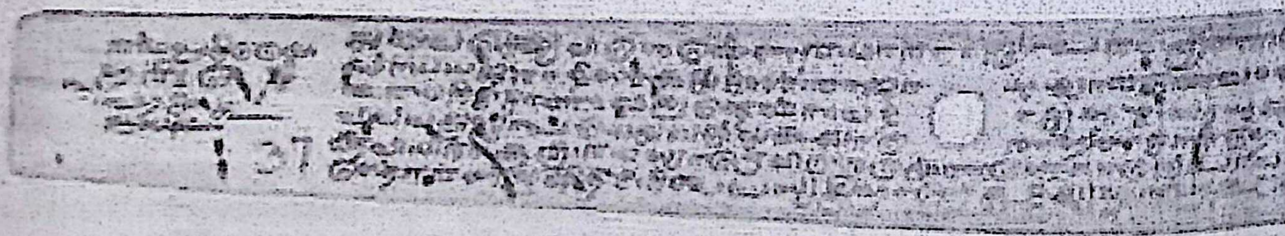
Some of panels also can be explained to be from the stories in the Vedas and Puranas. It is said that the "Aswins" were born from "Surya" and his wife in the form of a "Horse". The story of the birth of "Valli" the consort of Lord Muruga by the co-habitation of a Rishi and a deer necessitate the presence of bestiality panel. The birth of sage "Agastaya" to "Urvashi" when she had Union with Varuna and Maitra explains presence of panel of one woman with two lovers.

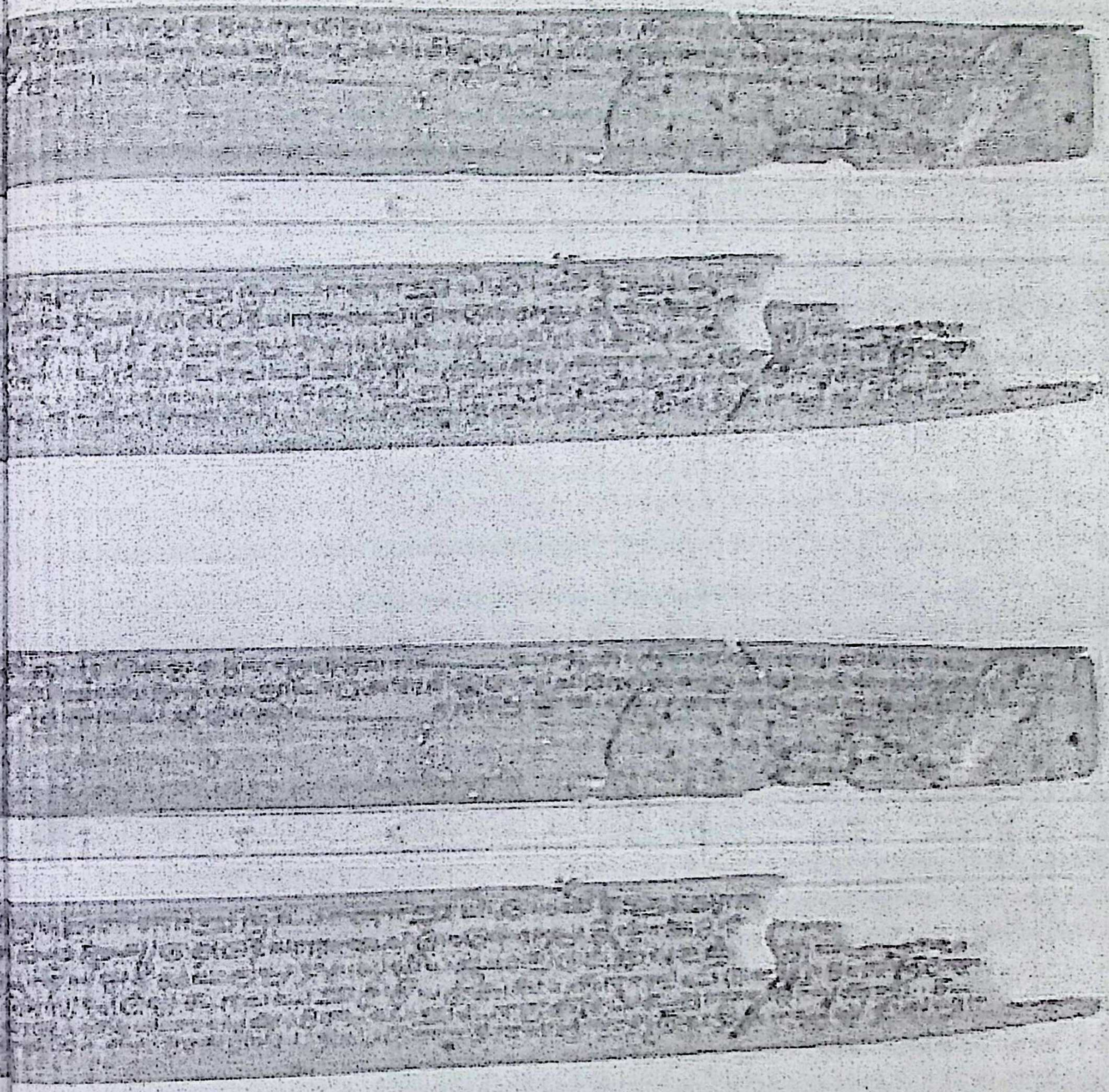
APPENDIX











A sample of grantha script on devaratham from the library of French Institute Puducherry

ततः परम विशोषेणारथस्यात्वास्तुलक्षणम्।
मूलप्रासादमानन्तु प्राकारे पूर्व्यनिव्रकम्॥
अन्तर्मण्डलमुर्दि तु पञ्चप्राकारनिव्रकम्।
पञ्चप्राकारमानन्तं विधिमध्ये तु योजयेत्॥
विधिविस्तारमेवं वा स्थपती स्थापकेन तु।
त्रिहस्तन्तु मारभ्या षड्वडङ्गुलवर्धयेत्॥
एकविंशति हस्तान्तं सप्तांशत्त्रियमानकम्।
अन्तर्मण्डमादितु महामर्यादिशोभितम्॥
तत्तन्मने तु मानं वा षड्गुभायादिशोभनम्।
विस्तारे आयशोभेन तारदीर्घन्तु संयुतम्।
प्राकारपरितो चैवा तत्पदं आयशोभयेत्॥
चतुर्दिक्कङ्पाशान्तु नामवह्निन्तु प्रयोजयेत्।
तत्कङ्म् अभिन्नते चैवा प्राणिनाशन्तु मथापि वा।
प्रासादे ब्रह्मसूत्रं वा चतुर्दिक्बाह्ययोजयेत्।
भिन्नेस्यात् सूत्रसंयुक्तं द्विजादिनं तु नाशनम्॥
तस्मात्सर्वप्रयन्तेना मानसूत्रशुभं भवेत्।
पादस्य रथमेवापि मध्यवारारियोजयेत्॥
पादार्घन्तु रथञ्चैवा मध्यदेस्थन्तु योजितम्।
अर्धस्य रथमेवापि रथमानन्तु तच्छुभम्॥
विपरिते विधिसंयुक्तं सर्वनाशं जनक्षयम्।
तस्मात्सर्वप्रयत्नेनाशुभविधि तु योजयेत्।
स्थपती स्थापके चैवा अष्टदिक्केलसंयुतम्॥
बलिहीने तु खंवापि सर्वनाशं तथापि वा।
पूर्वे सम्भवे चैवा पश्चिमे बृद्धियोजितम्॥
चतुर्दिक् युक्तिसम्वापि हीनबुद्धि तु दोशभाक्।

एकद्वित्रिथिकं ह्रीकात् ब्रह्मसजितु पूर्वकम्।
अष्टदिक् सजिमवापि स्तापके पूर्वमुच्यते।
विरोधसजिमानेन नकरस्यादिदोषकम्।
तस्मात्पण्डिते चैवा वास्तुमानन्तु योजितम्।
स्थपती स्थापके कर्ता मानस्यात्पूर्णमाचरेत्।
बलिस्याद्भेदमानन्तु संयुक्तं पूर्ववत्भवेत्॥
इति ऐन्द्रमते वस्तुशास्त्रे एकनवतिपटलः॥
सर्वेषां वास्तुविन्यासं लक्षणं वक्ष्यते द्विजाः।
देवमानुषकं नैवाशुभं वास्तुमेव तु॥
सर्वेषां हर्म्यंध्ये चा वास्तुनीवृन्तु बुद्धिमान्।
पञ्चप्रकारसंयुक्तं वास्तुमानं विधीयते॥
मध्याहारन्तु बाह्ये तु रथवीधिशुभं भवेत्।
प्राकारक्षीणकं चैवा दण्डमानन्तु मेव वा॥
प्रासादतारदण्डं वा चतुर्दण्डन्तु दण्डकम्।
स्थपती स्थापके कर्ता दण्डनीव्रन्तु मेव वा॥
चतुर्दिक्ब्रह्मसूत्रेन्तु दण्डमानन्तु वर्धयेत्।
चतुषड्यंशदण्डानां वास्तुविस्तारविन्यसेत्॥
शित्यदण्डन्तु एवं वा विस्तारं मध्यमं भवेत्।
नवती षड्यन्तु दण्डानीं उत्तमन्तु मथापि वा॥
रथलक्षणं मुडुन्तुते ----
मसूरकं गुणभागन्तु सपादं नवपादकम्।
प्रस्तरोश्चंत्रियर्थांशं चरणं षड्यांशवादकम्॥
साद्धांशं मूर्ध्वमञ्चैव सममध्यां वेदिकोदयम्।
सार्धांशं गलमानन्तु युगांशं शिखरेदयम्॥
सत्रिपादांशकं स्तुपि मानन्तत्त्रितलादिषु।

मसूरकं गुणभागन्तु अङ्घ्रिरुद्रांशकं भवेत्।
मञ्चमानद्विभागेन और्ध्वपादन्तु षडांशकम्॥
एकार्धं और्ध्वमञ्चं वा तलं पञ्चांशमेव वा।
मञ्चमानं शिवांशं स्यात् ग्रीवमानं द्वियर्धकम्॥
शिखरे इन्द्रियभागन्तु स्तुपिमानन्तु द्विभागिकम्।
मानन्तत् रथग्रीवविधानेना मानन्तत्त्रितलादिषु॥
धिनत रथलक्षण ------ स्तपतिस्वहस्तलिखितम्। शुभमस्तु।

APPENDIX

Reference and further reading :

1. Temple treasures volume III 'Chariots' published by craft council of Karnataka by Dr Choodamani Nandagopal and Vastala Iyengar

2. Visvakarmiya Rathalakshanam A study of Ancient Indian Chariots by R P Kulkarni, Kanishka Publishers Delhi 1994

3. Temple cars of Medieval Tamilam by Dr Raji Kalidos, Vijay publishers, Madurai.

4. Temple cars referred to in inscriptions by N Sethuraman.

5. Alayam The Hindu temple by V Venketaramana Reddy, Ramakrishna mission Chennai.

6. The Hindu temple volume I and II by Stella Kramrisch.

7. Mayamata edited and translated by Bruno Degans.

8. Indian Architecture according to Manasara Shilpasastra by Prasanna Kumar Acharya.

9. Savitri – Sri Aurobindo Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

10. Sri Aurobindo on Indian Art by Elizabeth Beck SABDA Pondicherry

11. Ganesha by Shakuntala Jaganathan and Nanditha Krishna

12. Lakshmi an Introduction by Devdutt Patnaik

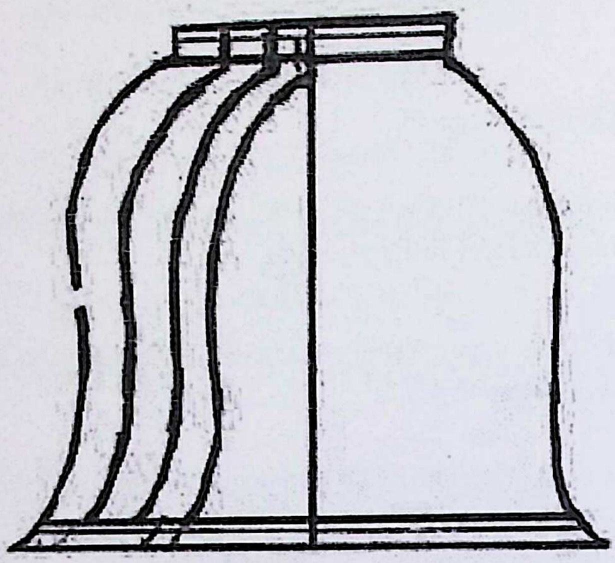


Figure No 1

Bell like shape of the top of the Vimana below the Kalasa and Dwajasthamba. Sometime it is circular in shape or three dimensional polygonal in shape.

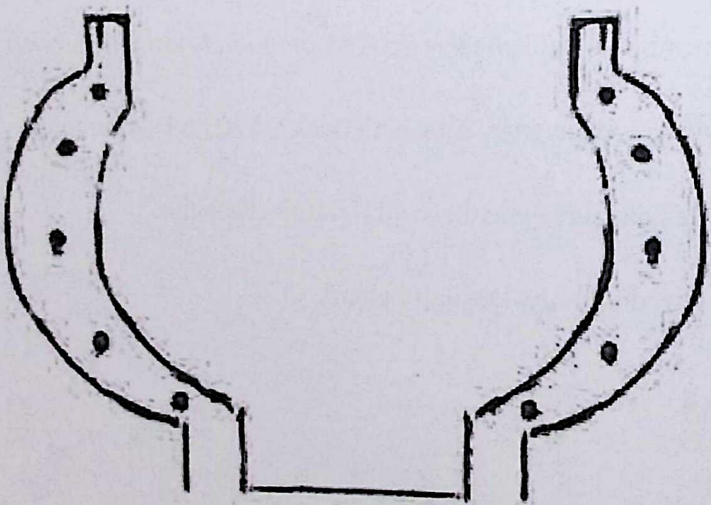


Figure No 2

A vertical cross section of the above figure

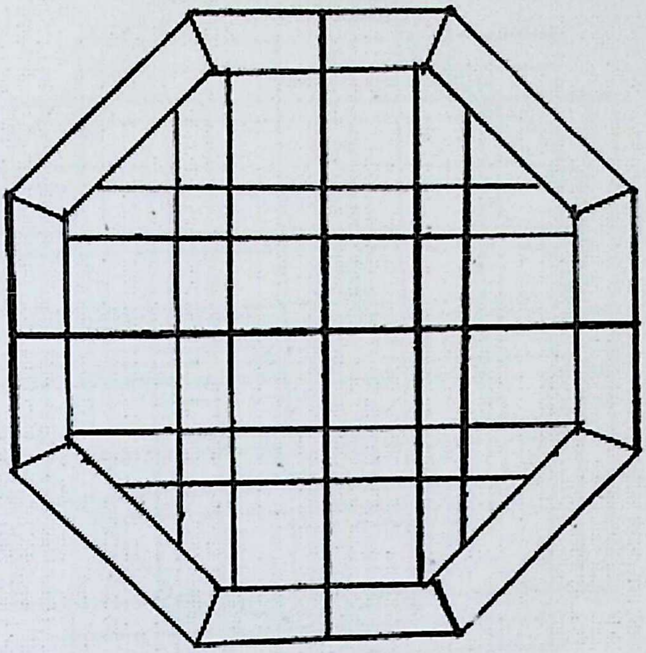


Figure No 3

Cross section of the top of the Vimana. It supports the Kalasa and dwaja-sthamba. It is polygonal in shape with eight surfaces or octagonal in shape. There are two cross bars supporting the eight surface bars.

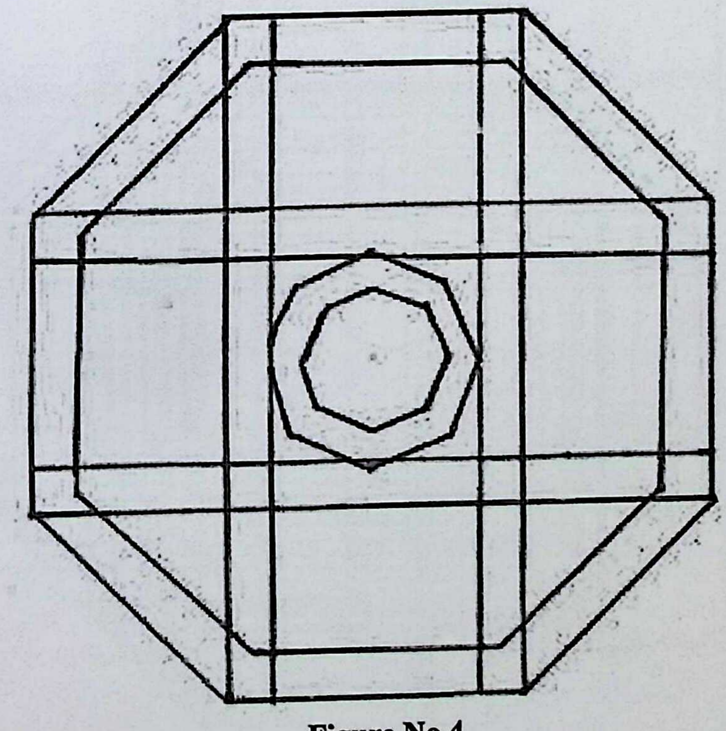


Figure No 4

The some figure as above with super imposition of the bell like structure (Neck) of the Vimana below the Kalasa at the centre of the structure.

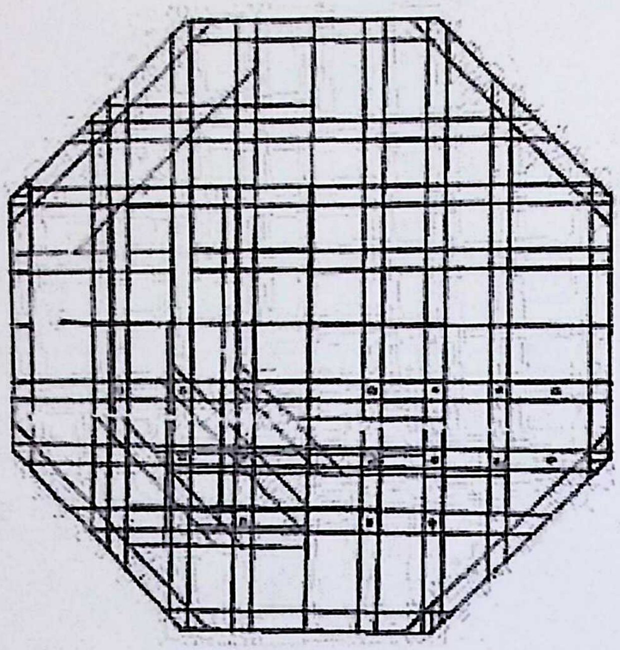


Figure No 5

The second level from above forming the cross section structure. It is again octagonal in shape but has sixteen cross bars supporting it. The intersection of each set of four cross bars forms multiple intersections. Each quadrant has thirteen points and thus a total of fifty two points where the vertical wooden bars end from the platform to hold the Vimana.

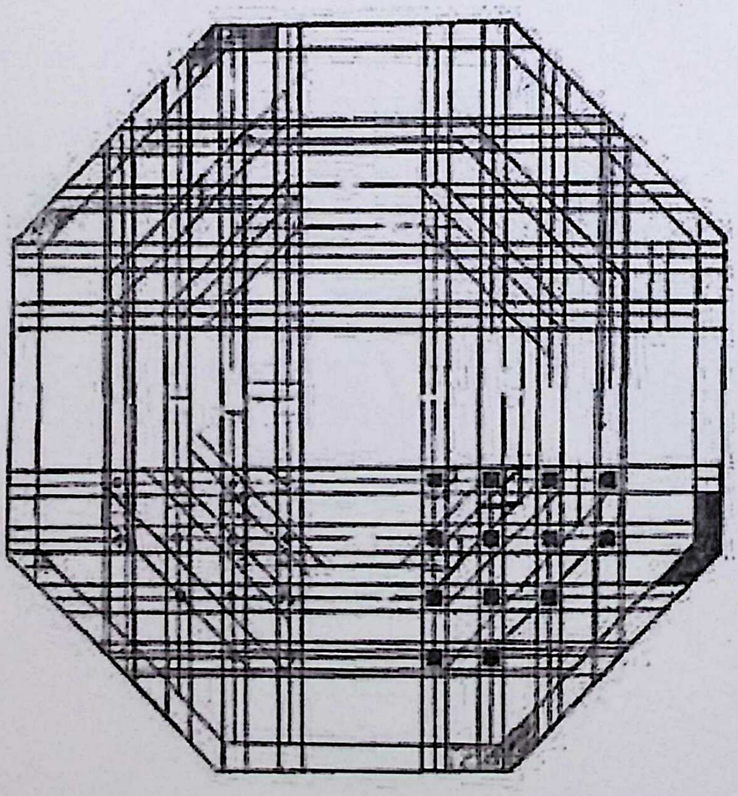


Figure No 6

The octagonal part of the Vimana at the third level where there are four cross bars in each quadrant with fixation of the vertical bars at thirteen points in each quadrant.

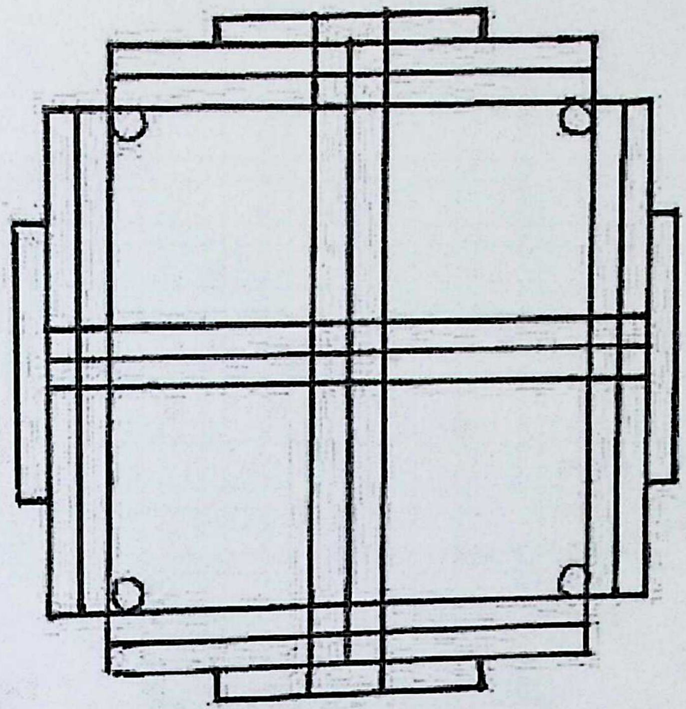


Figure No 7

The supporting framework of his platform of the temple ratham. There are eight surfaces with the four primary directions being straight. The secondary four directions are broken up into multiple (three to seven) mini projection

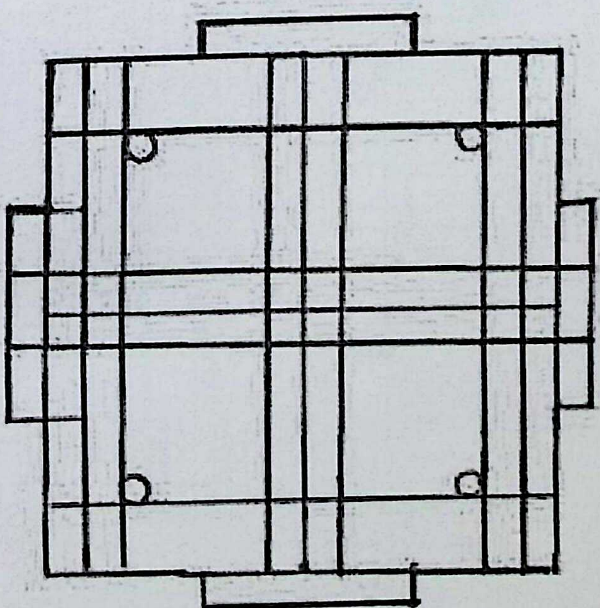


Figure No 8

The framework of the pedestal for the utshavamurti at the centre of the platform of the devaratham.

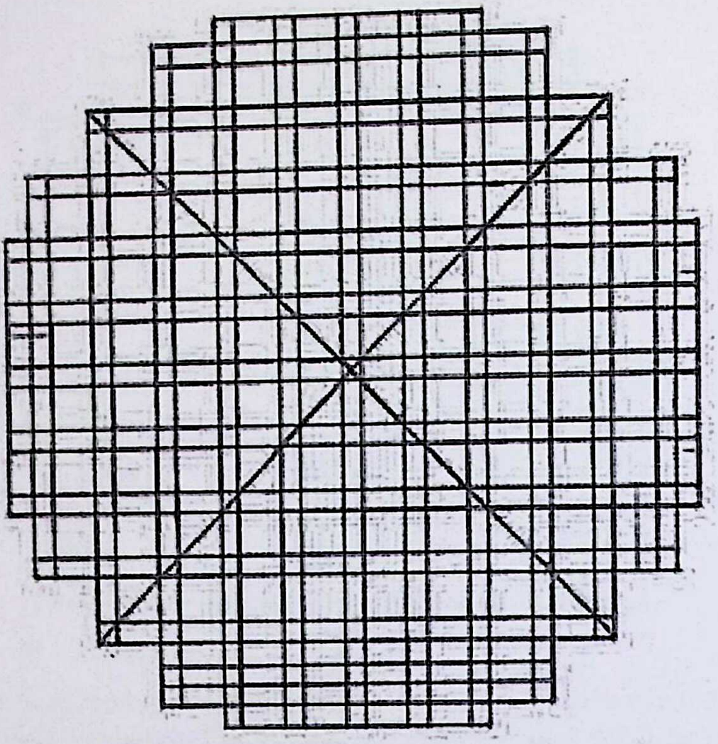


Figure No 9

The framework of the devaratham below that of the pedestal with planks covering it forming the ther thetu

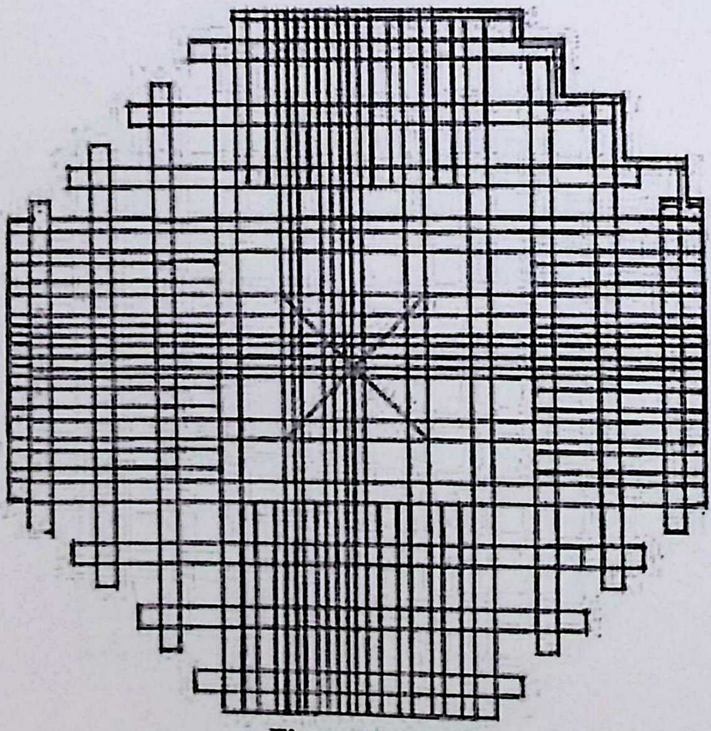


Figure No 10

The frame details exactly below the platform. It is covered by flat strips of wood to cover it completely. There are ten main strips of wooden blocks in both directions, their intersection form the base for the platform and the projection seen outside.

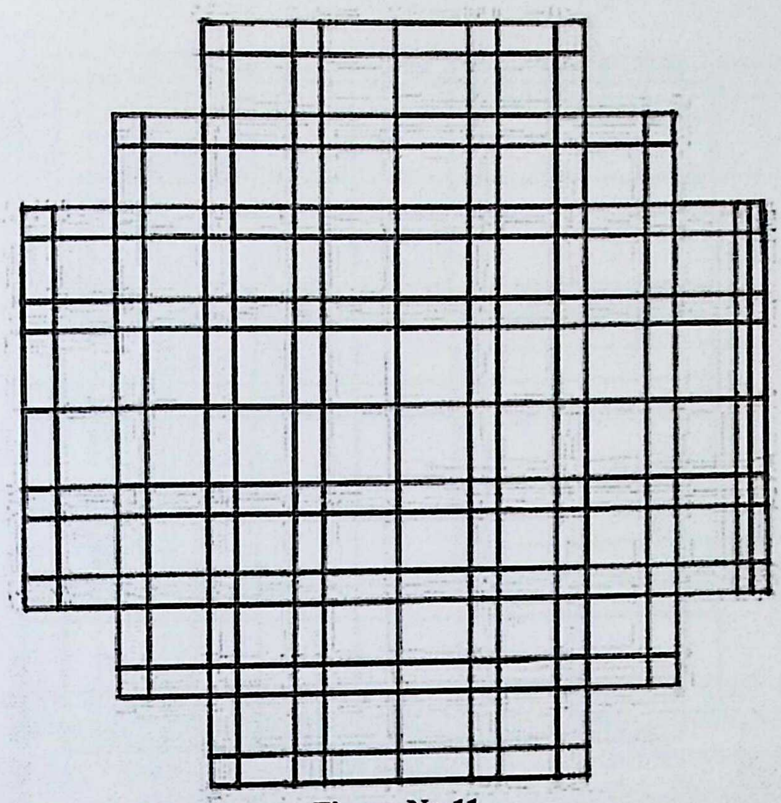


Figure No 11

The frame below the main platform. The secondary surface has only three projections. It forms the base of the third tier in the temple car and thus smaller than the platform but larger than the 2nd tier.

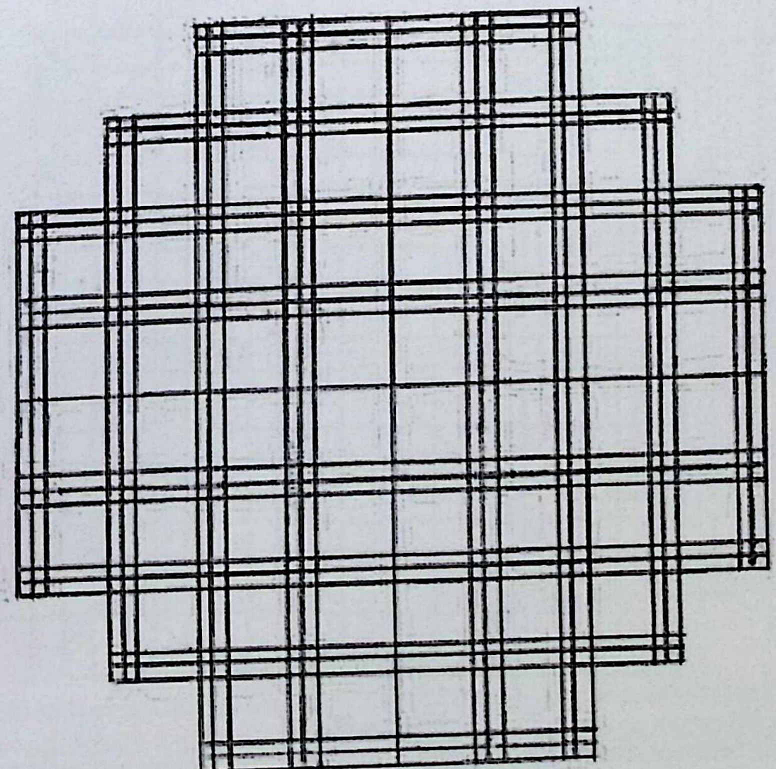


Figure No 12

The frame details of above with aditional markings

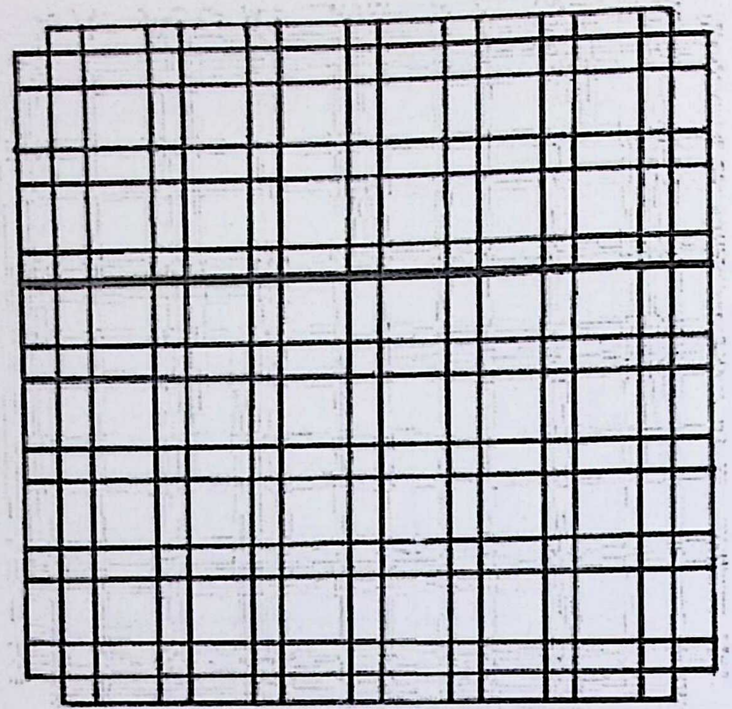


Figure No 13

A total of fourteen wooden blocks crossing each other (seven in east west and seven in north south directions) to form four corners. This forms the base of the second tier of images and roof of the first tier, thus forming forty-nine joints.

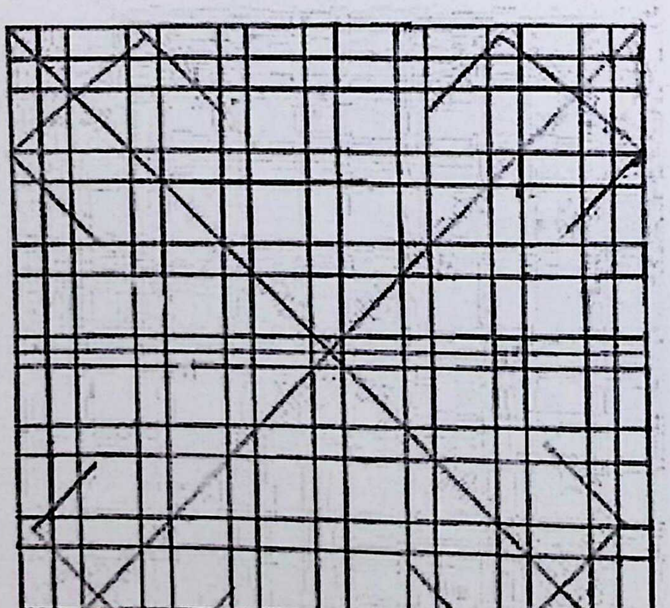


Figure No 12

A total of fourteen wooden blocks crossing each other (seven in east west and seven in north south directions) to form eight corners. More details with additional markings.

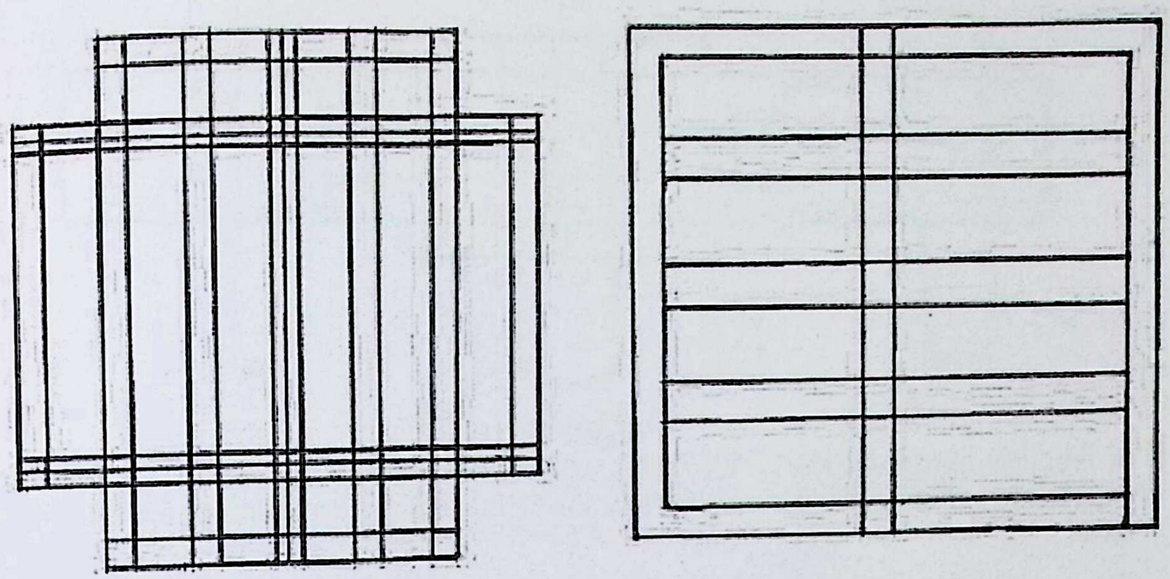


Figure No 15 & 16

Two rectangular frames placed one over the other with equal dimension. One rectangular frame has additional three bars to make a frame of five bars which is placed exactly above the two primary axles connecting the four wheels. The other frame is placed across and over this frame made up of bars and is parallel and inner to the axles. This forms the roof of the first tier. The next figure is a square frame of five wooden bars with a central cross bar.

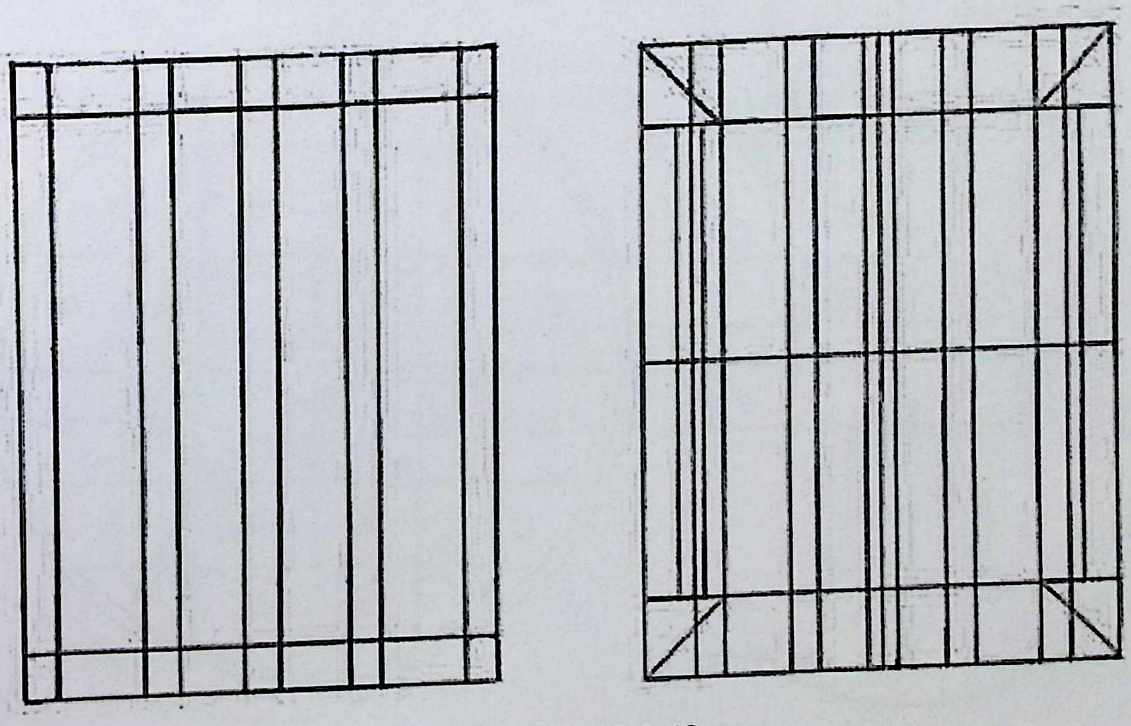


Figure No 17 & 18

The five bars placed across on the axle forming the bhootapar. The next figure is a rectangular frame of five wooden bars with the two side bars being twice the size in thickness of the other bars.

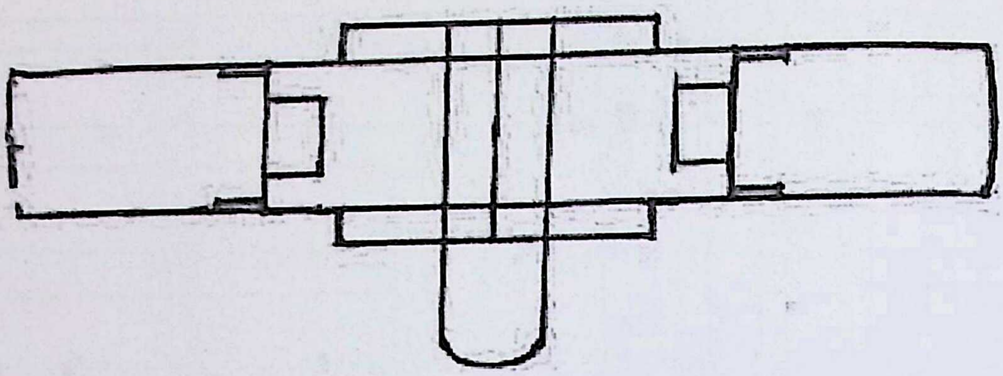


Figure No 19

A cross horizental section of the wheel achitecture made from wooden logs joined by interlocking grooves and the support from side with metal plate and central opening for the axle.

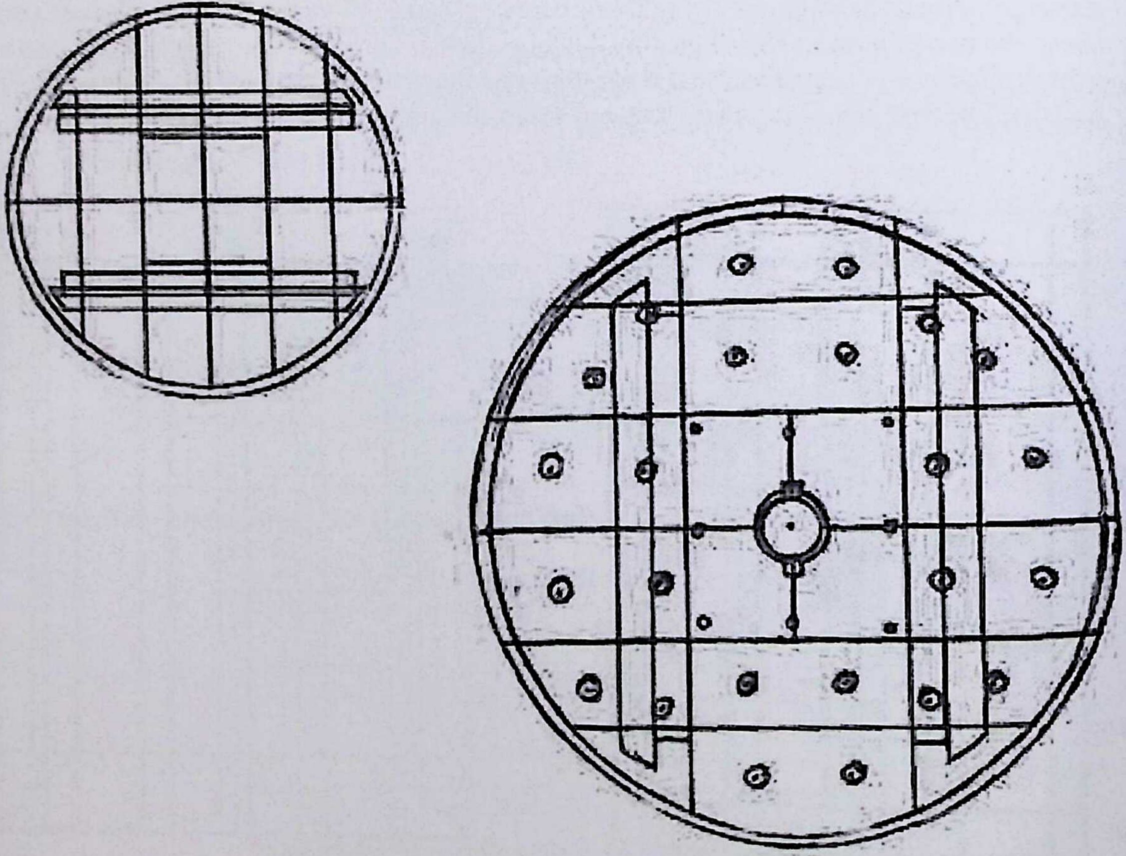


Figure No 20

A wheel seen from the outside with a metal/steel ring all around at its circumferences and divided into six segment in each half.

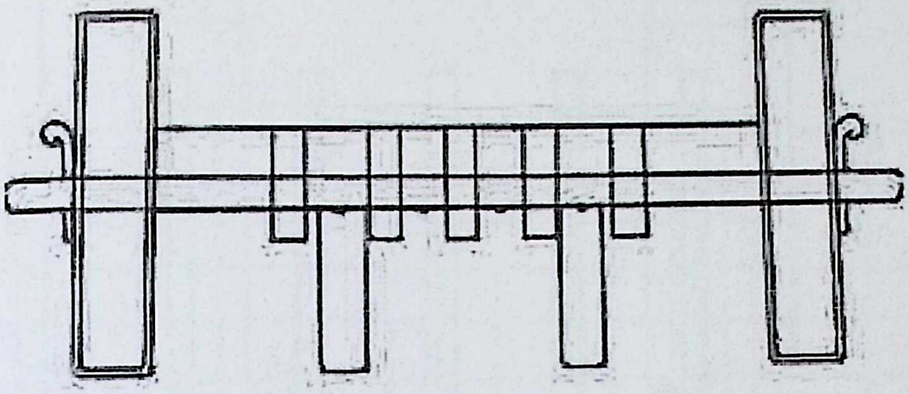


Figure No 21
Vertical section of the wheels axles' complex. Two main wheels both in front and back with the axles and a pin (ani) holding the axle and additional smaller inner wheels with five cross bars on the axle, partly projecting below the axle.

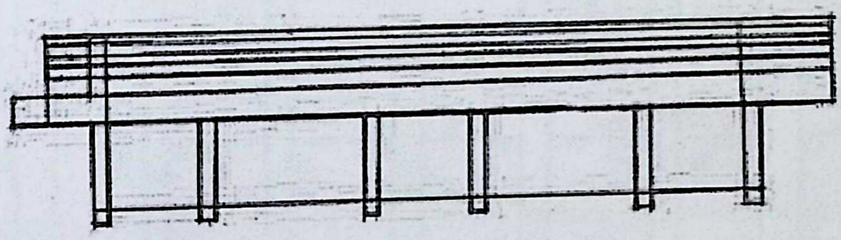


Figure No 22
The main axle and its various proportions in relation to the wheel

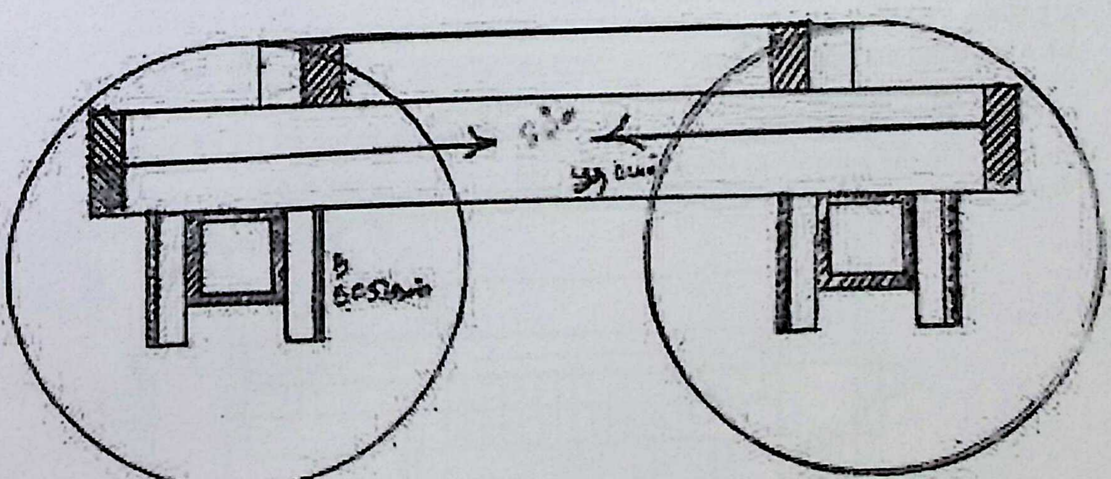
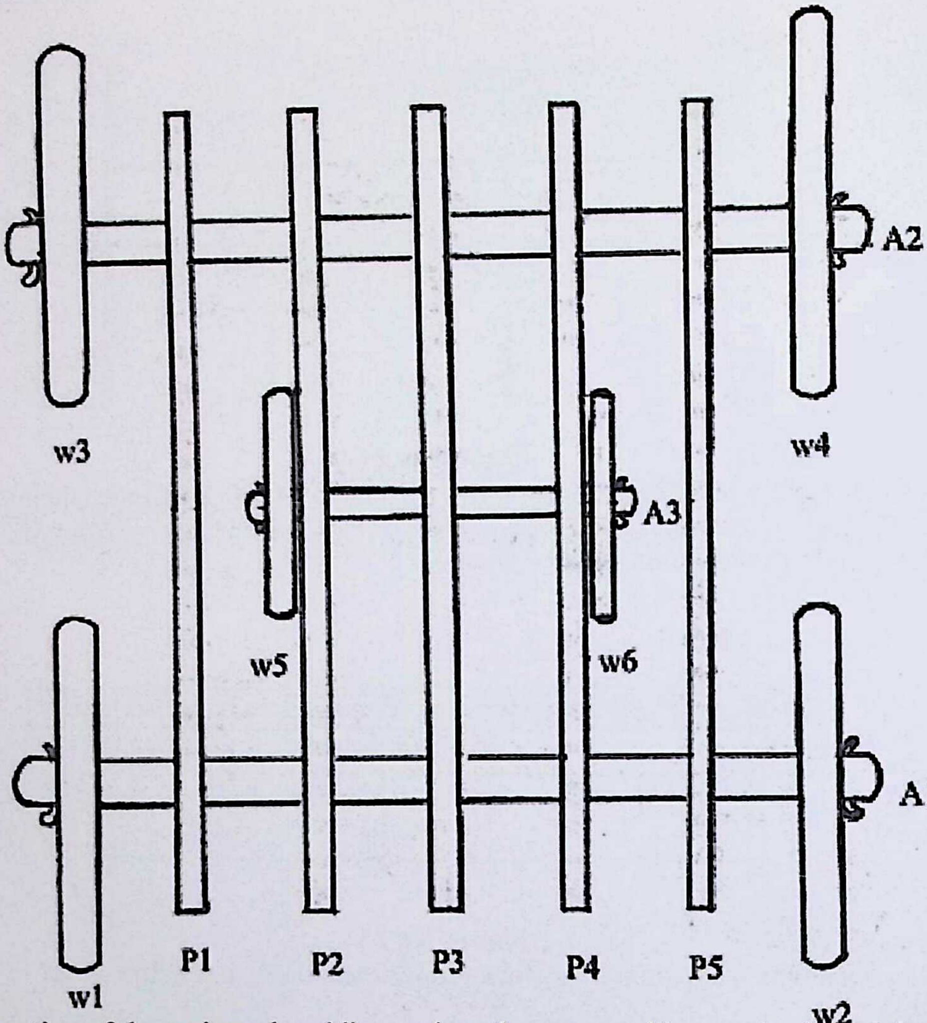
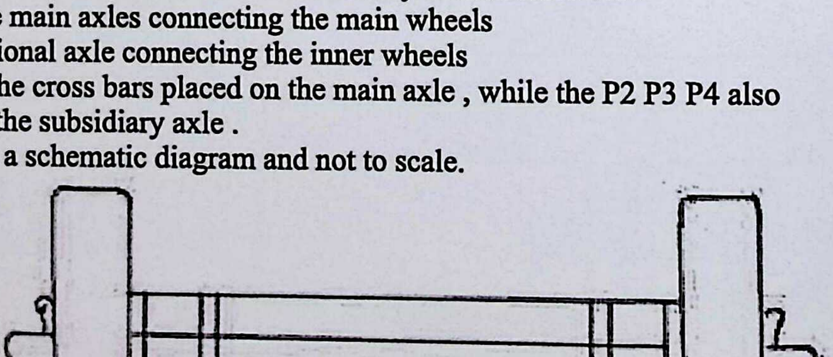


Figure No 23
The section of the wheel seen from the side with the hole for the axle and placement of the metal plate and screw to hold it.



Cross section of the main and susidiary axles , the outer and inner wheels and the cross bars which forms the main frame work for the baseof the devaratham.
W1 ,W2,W3,W4 : The main wheels of the ratham
W5,W6 : The central additional wheels usually hidden from veiw
A1 A2 are the main axles connecting the main wheels
A3 is the aditional axle connecting the inner wheels
P1 to P5 are the cross bars placed on the main axle , while the P2 P3 P4 also connected to the subsidiary axle .
Note : This is a schematic diagram and not to scale.



Structure of the axle and structure of the axle with the main wheels and accessory wheels at the centre as seen in the vertical section.

Figure No 24

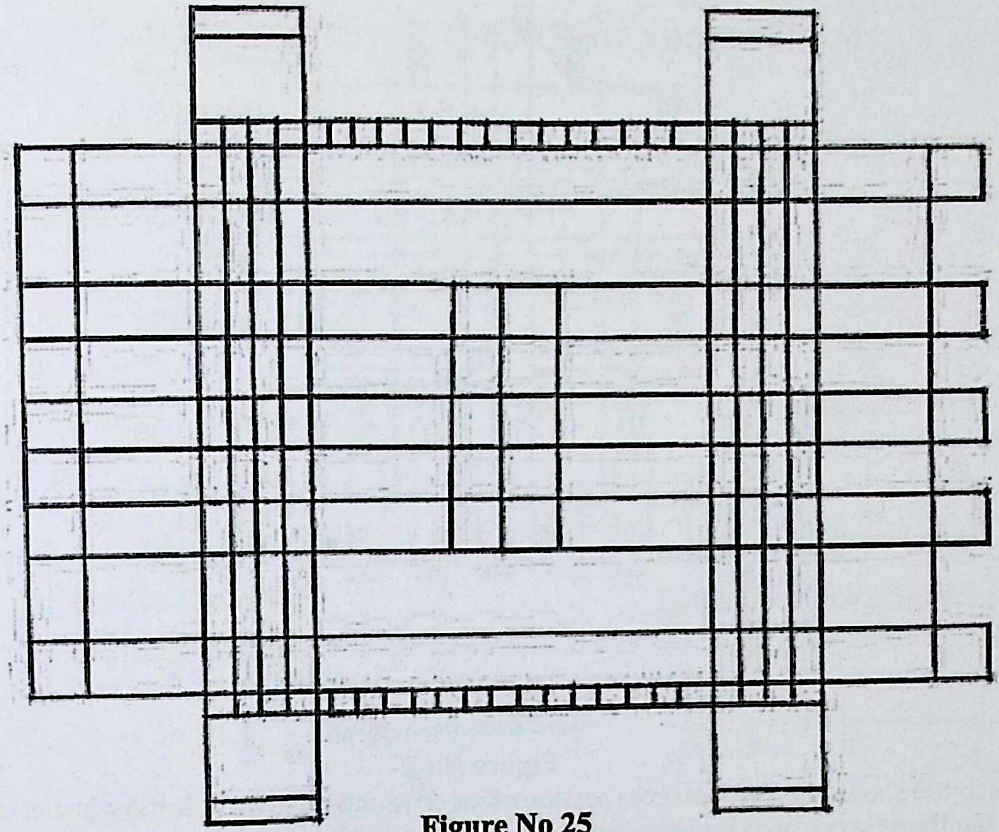


Figure No 25

Cross section of the two main axles and the set of five wooden bars placed on top of its other supporting thinner strips of wood interconnect it and a set of three cross bars at the centre of these of the five bars parallel to the axle is also seen.

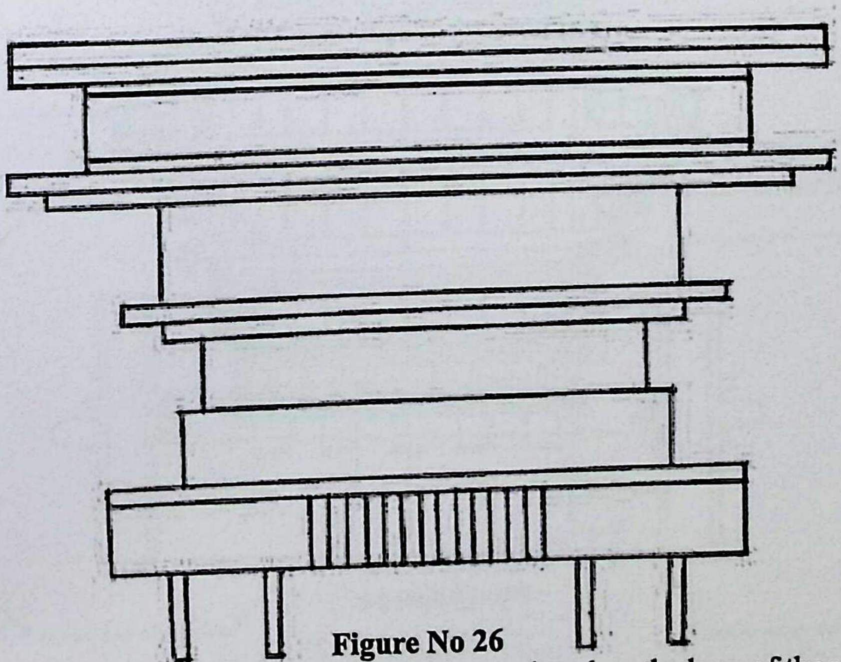


Figure No 26

The vertical section of the multiple frames which are placed on the base of the ratham. This section shows initial decreasing size of the frame only to expand up to end at the level of the platform.

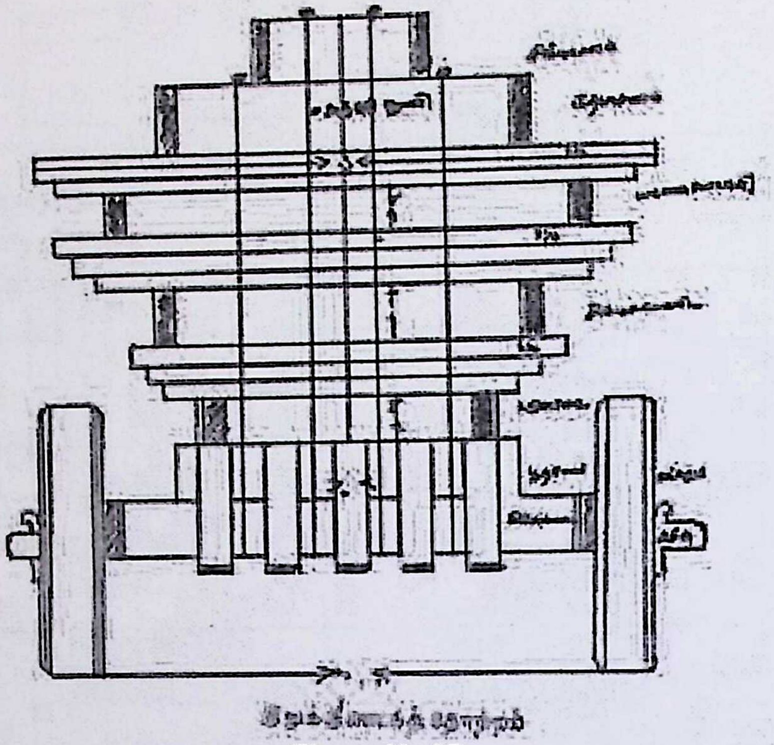


Figure No 27

This figure shows the vertical cross section of the devaratham to include the wheels, axle, base and the frame work on it for three tiers of panels, the platform and the two tier pedestal on the platform for the utshavamurti.

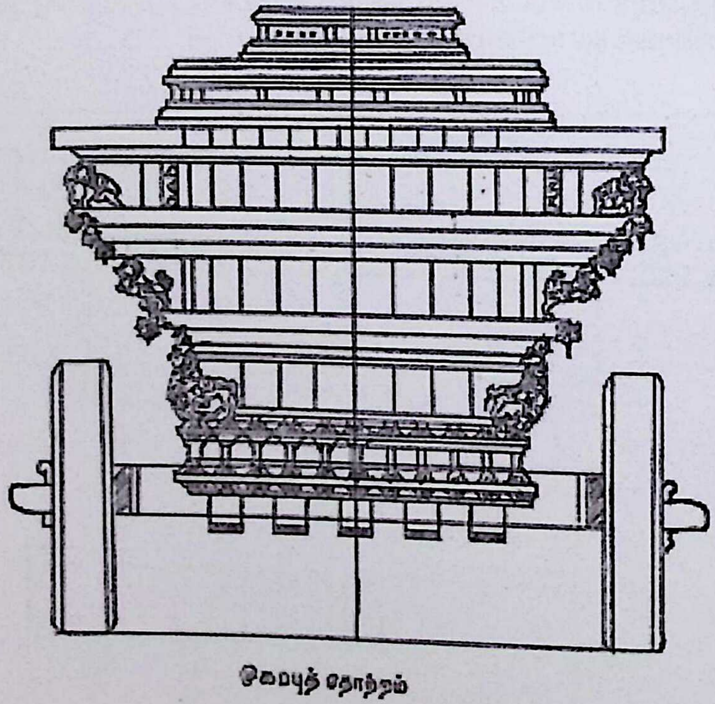
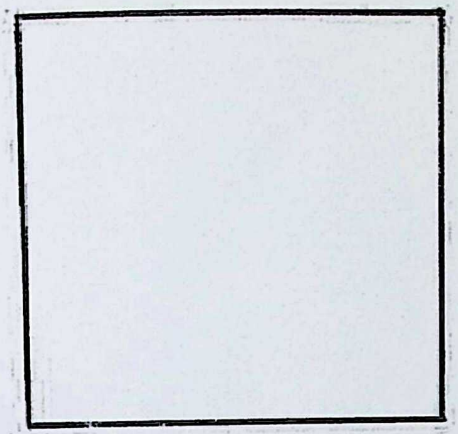


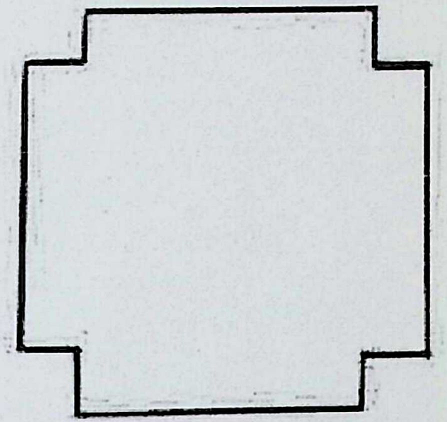
Figure No 28

This figure shows in more detail of the emerging structure of the devaratham with the wheels, axle, base, framework for three tiers, the platform and details of the two tiered pedestal and the various animal and Yali motifs which occupy the corners of the devaratham, ornamental decoration between the supporting structures at each level.

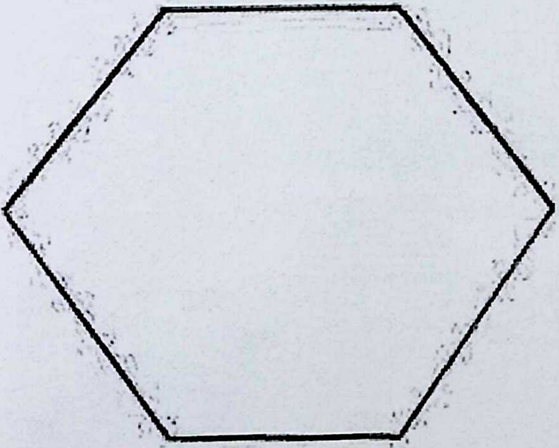
SHAPES OF THE PLATFORM OF THE RATHAM



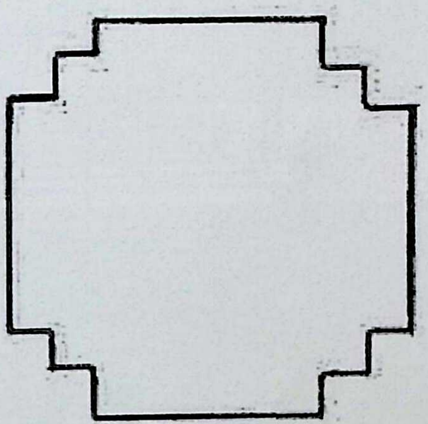
Squre or rectangular



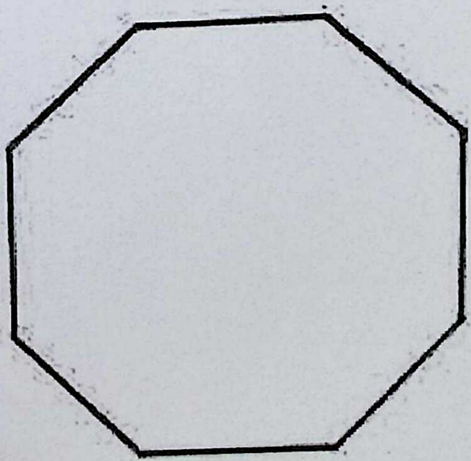
Single cut at the corners



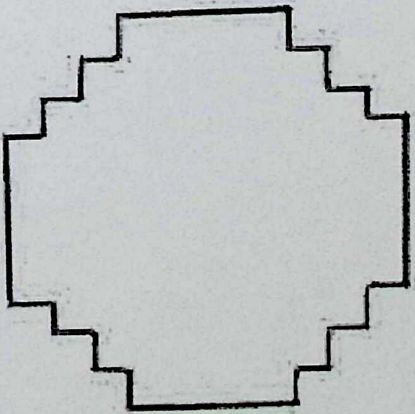
Octagonal



Two cuts at the corners

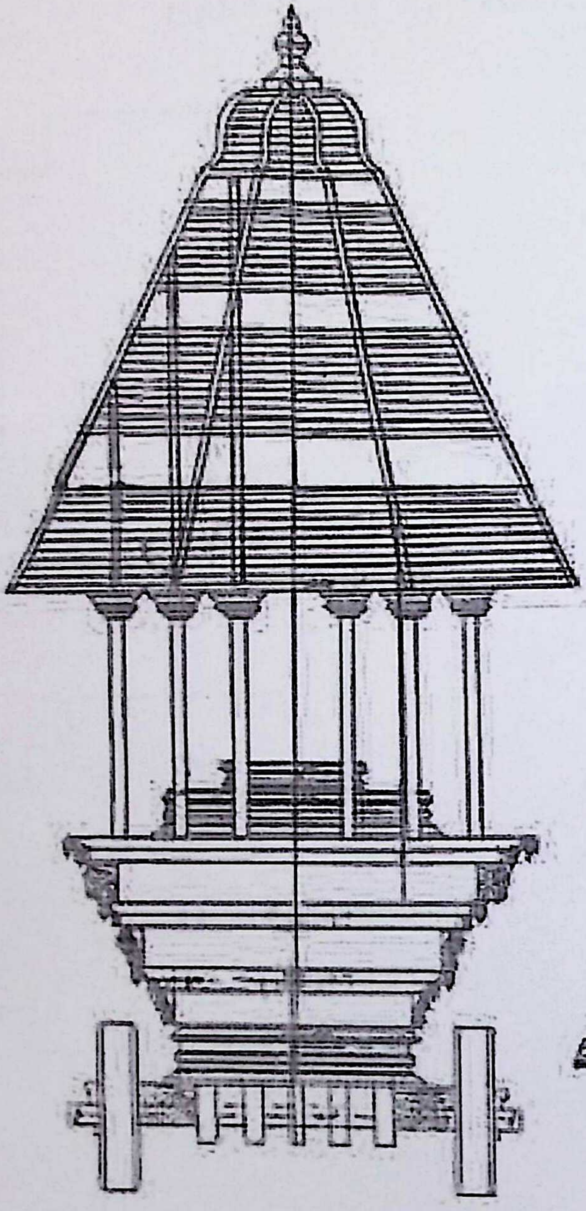


Polygonal with eight surfaces



Three cuts at the corners

Figure No 29



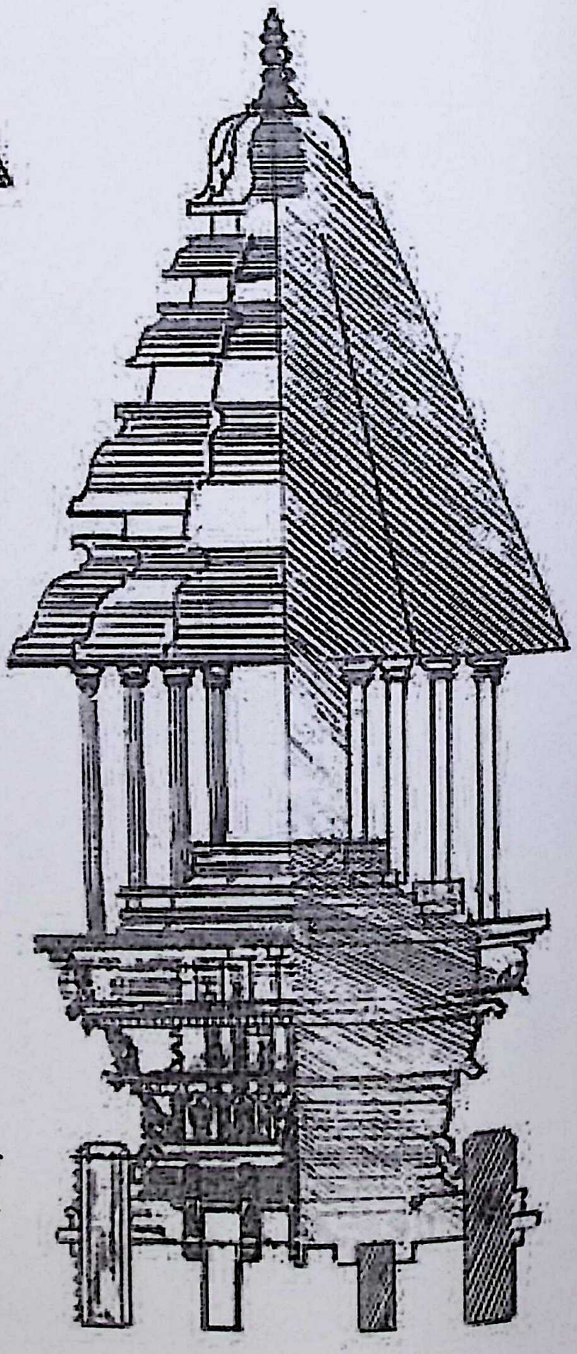
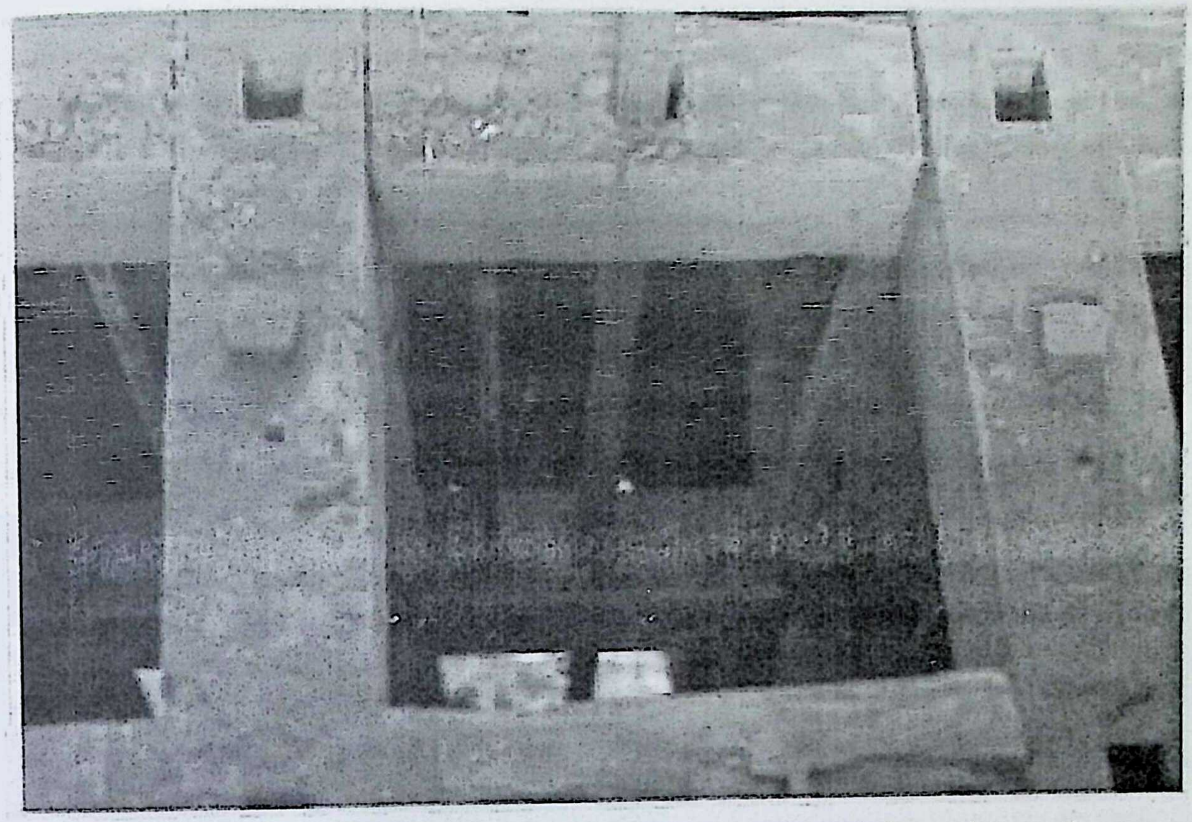
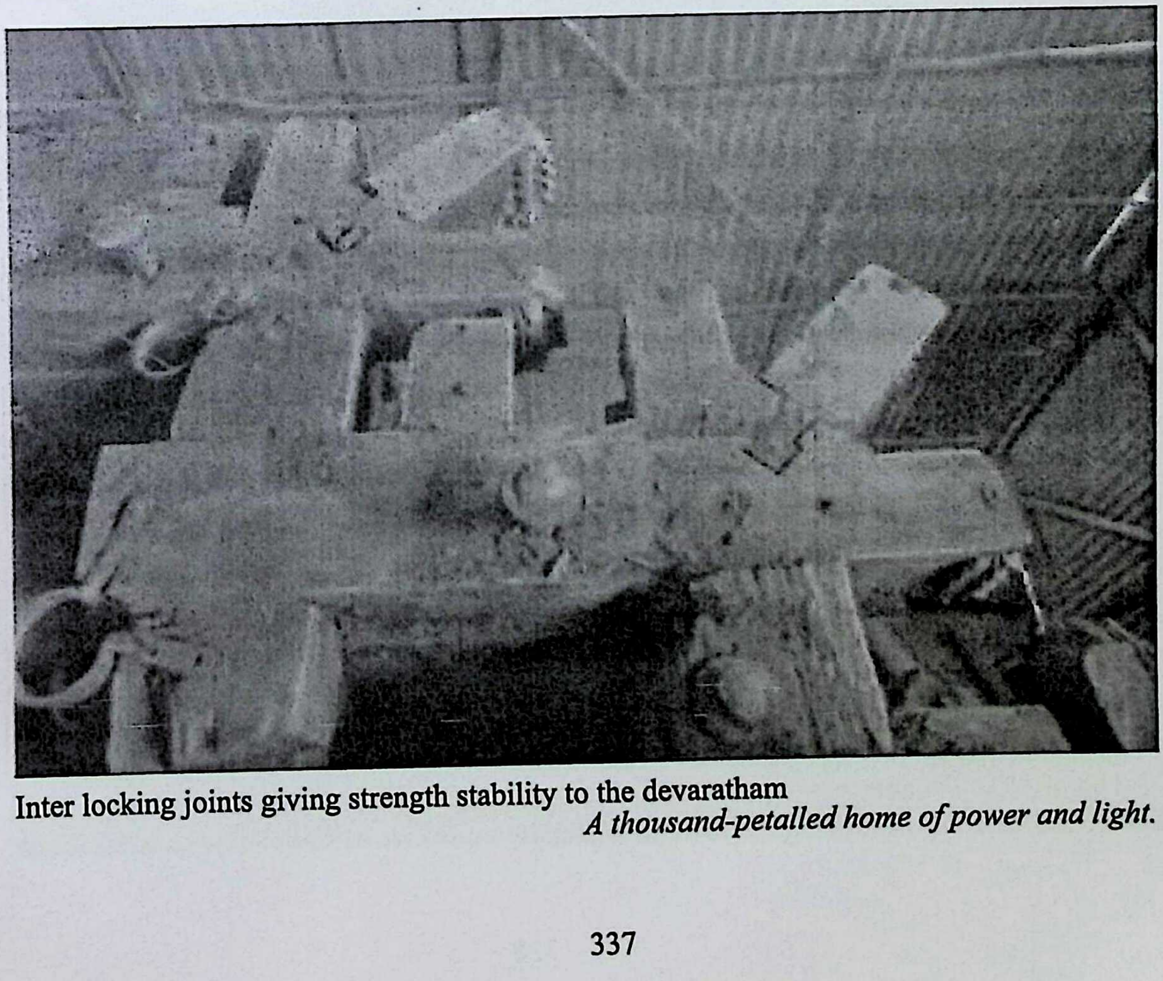


Figure No No 30 A & B

The two different structural designs of Devaratham with the three level vimana above and four level vimana below respectively.

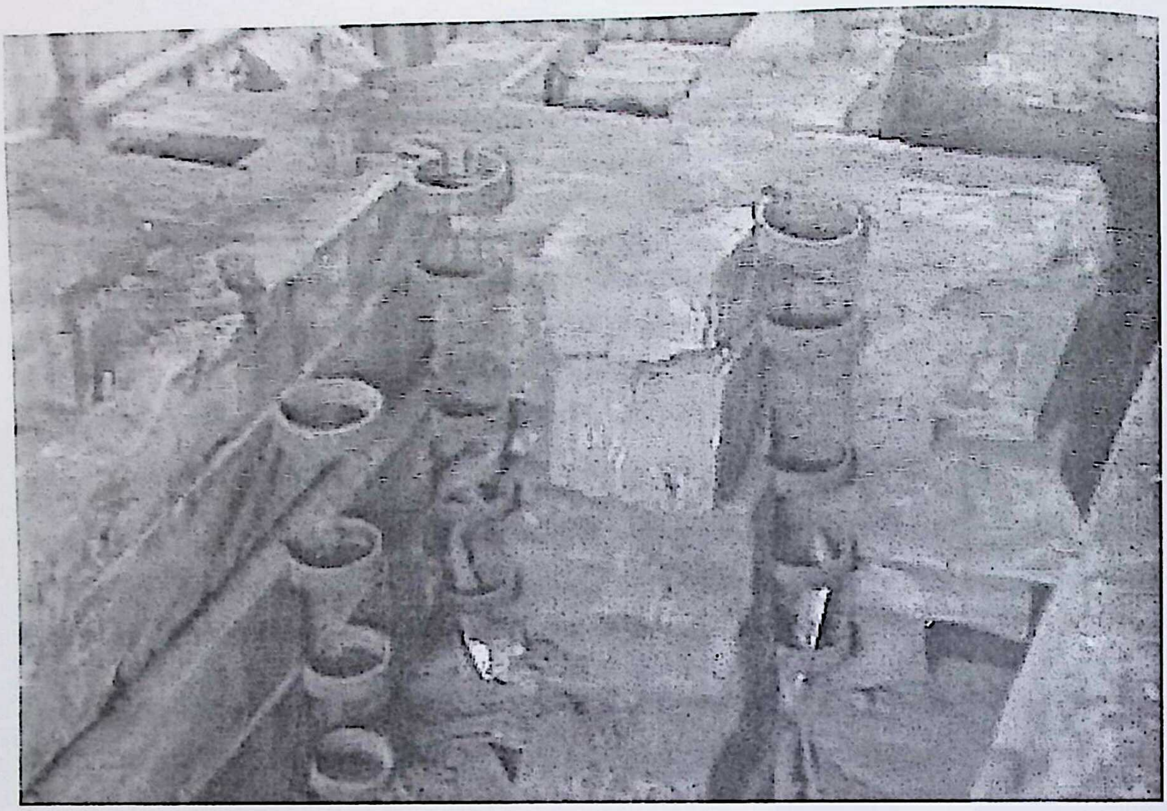


Squre shaped iron bars are used to hold different layers to give stability and strength.

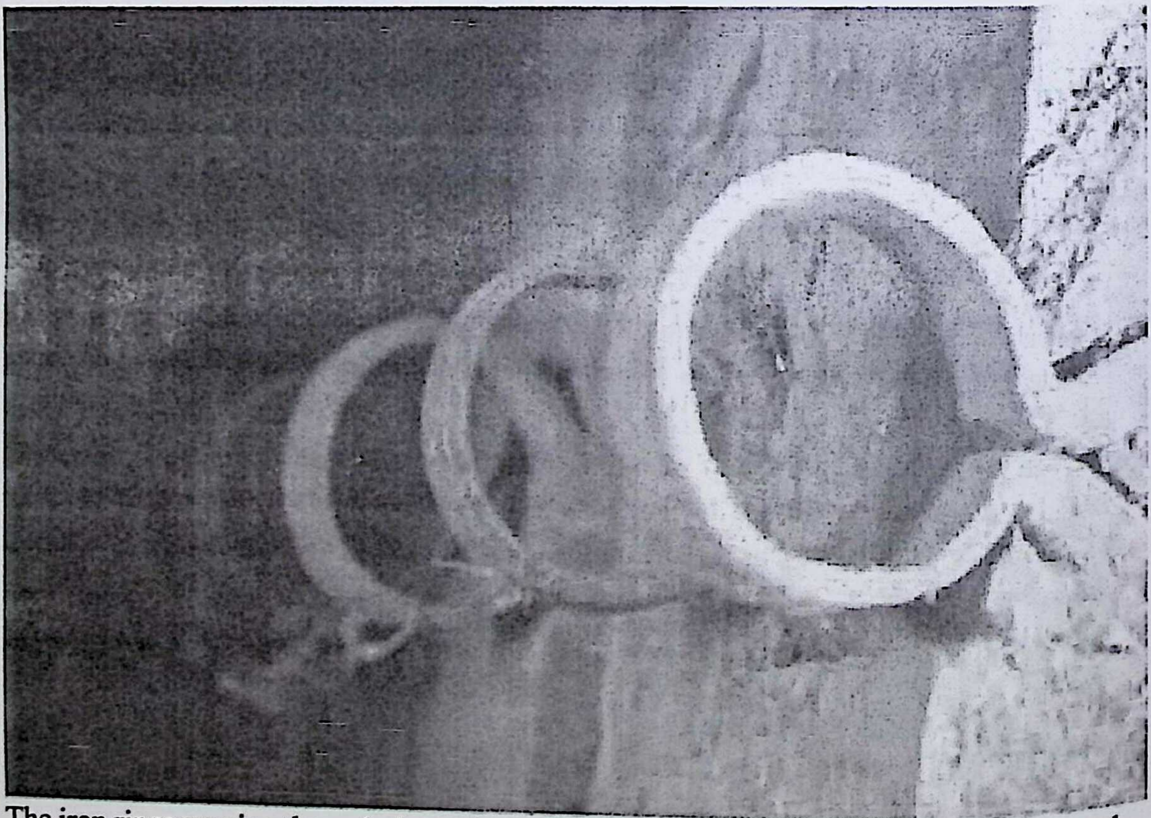


Inter locking joints giving strength stability to the devaratham

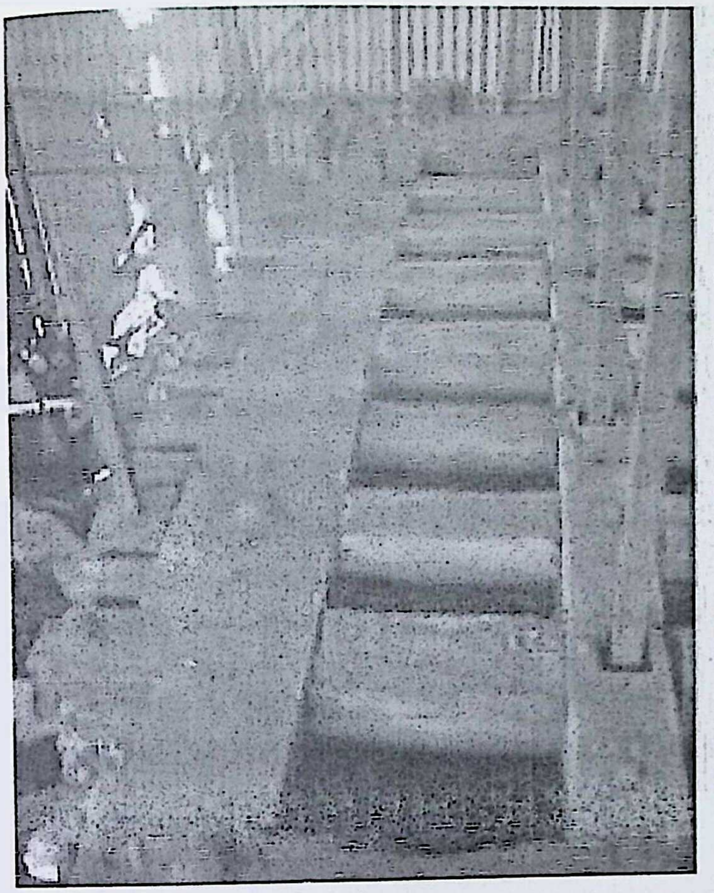
A thousand-petalled home of power and light.

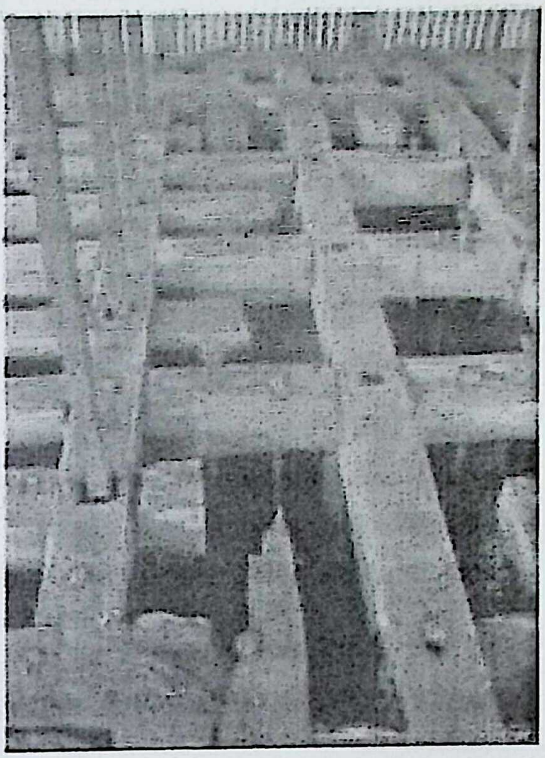


Iron rings to hold wooden poles.

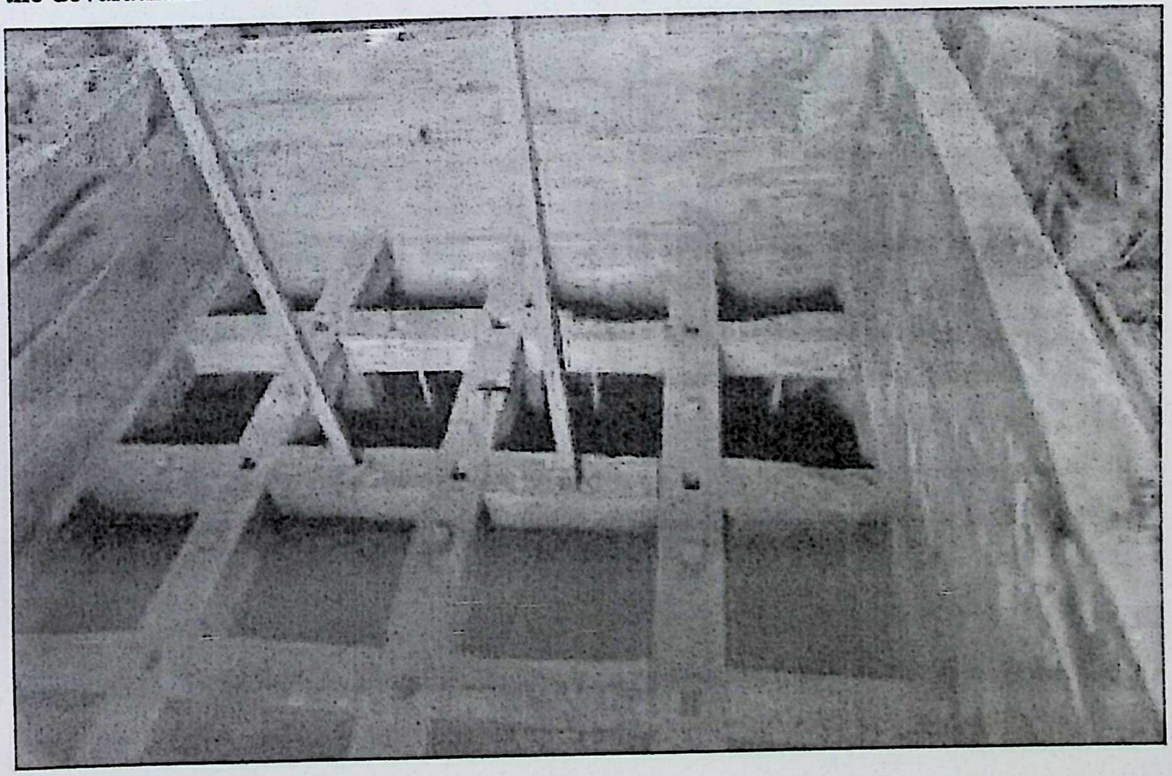


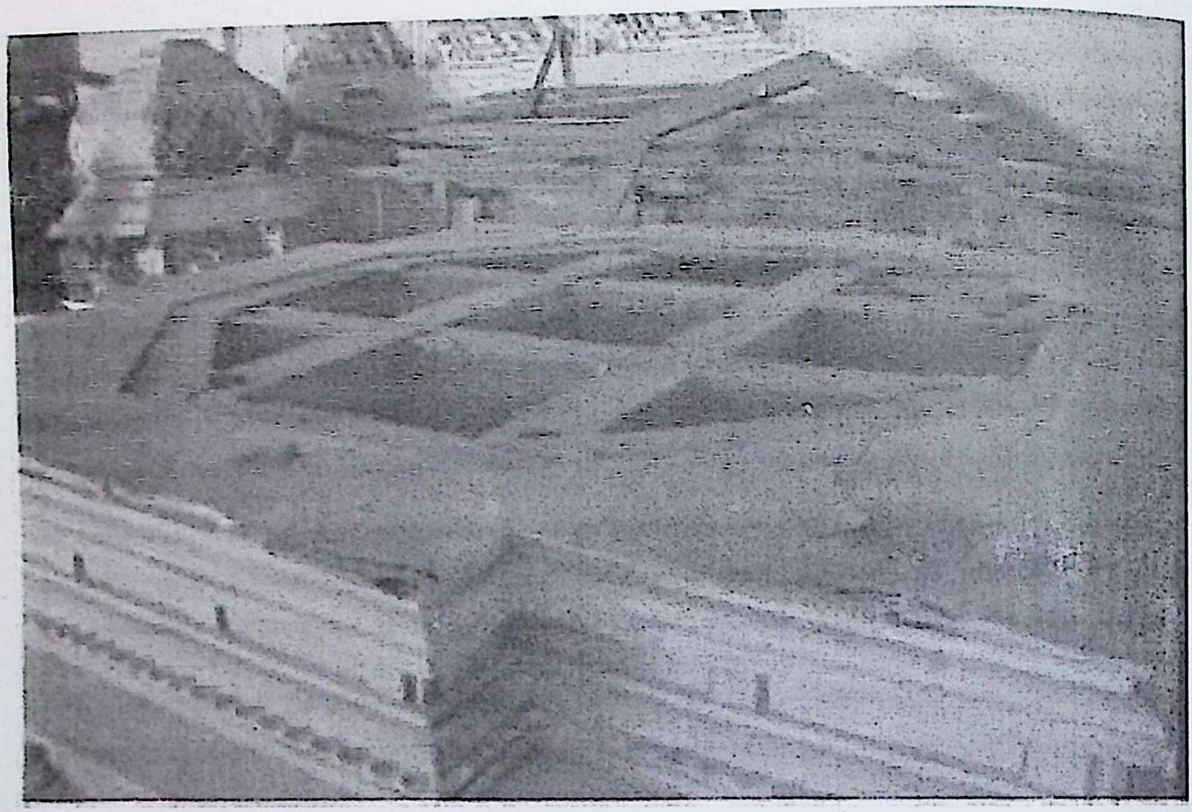
The iron rings running through the entire base, like clips with wooden poles being placed to hold them together and give additional strength.



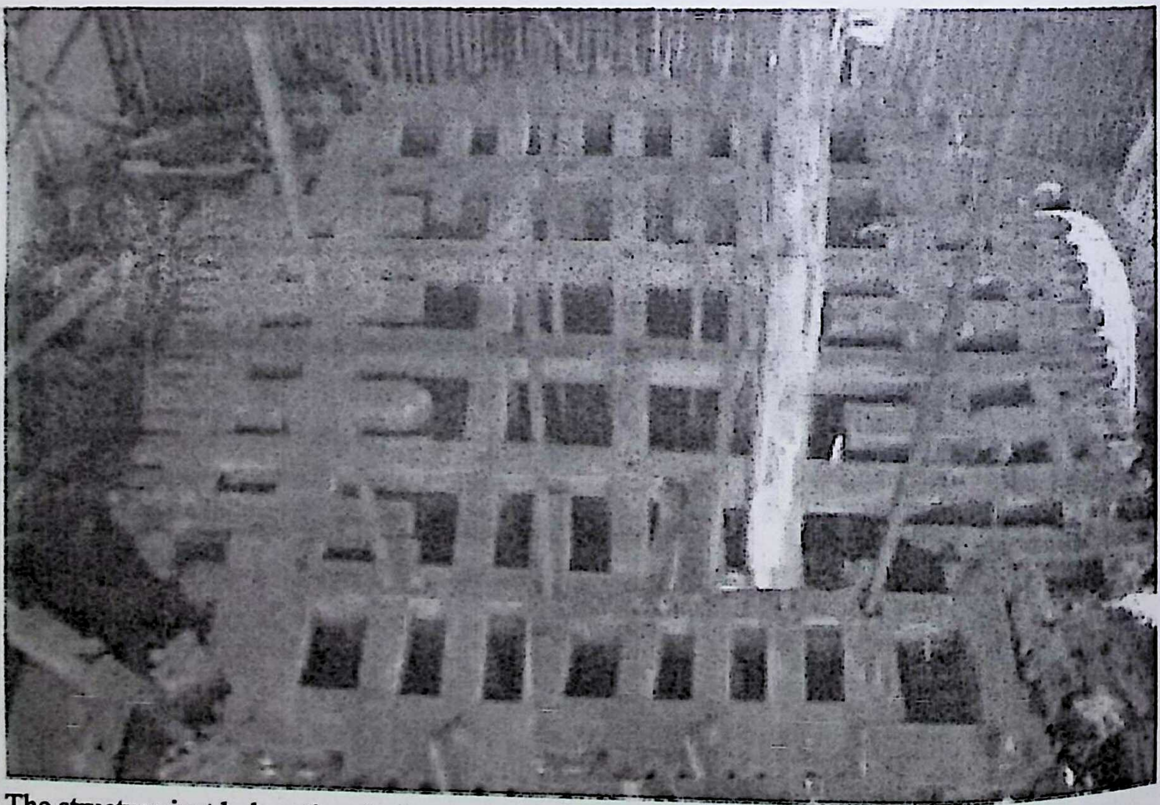


The many forms of joints hidden from the surface forms the supporting stracture of the devaratham.

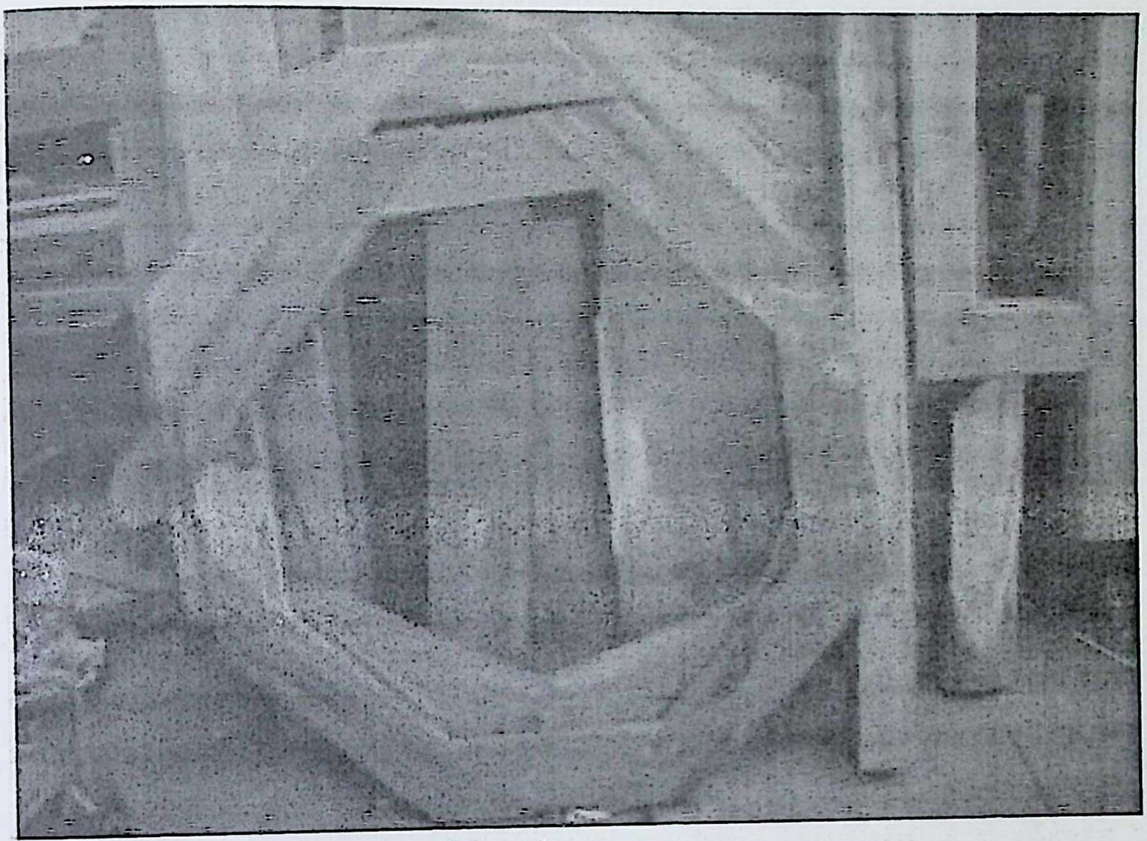




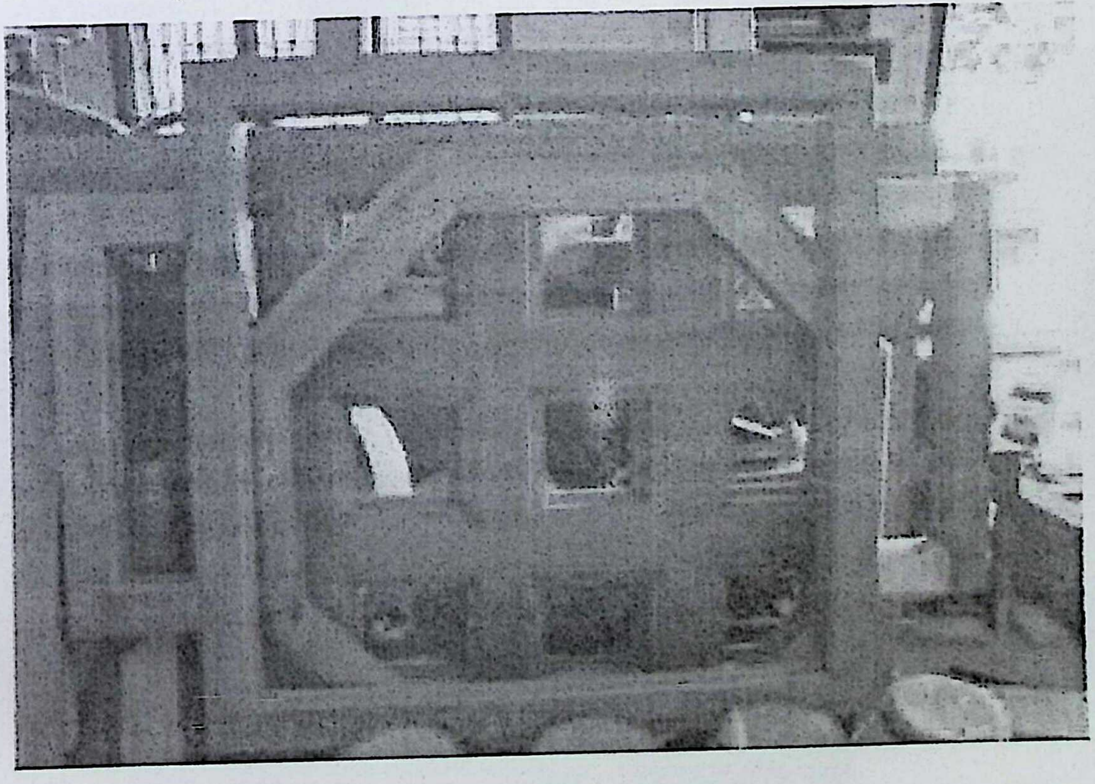
The structure just above the base of the ratham



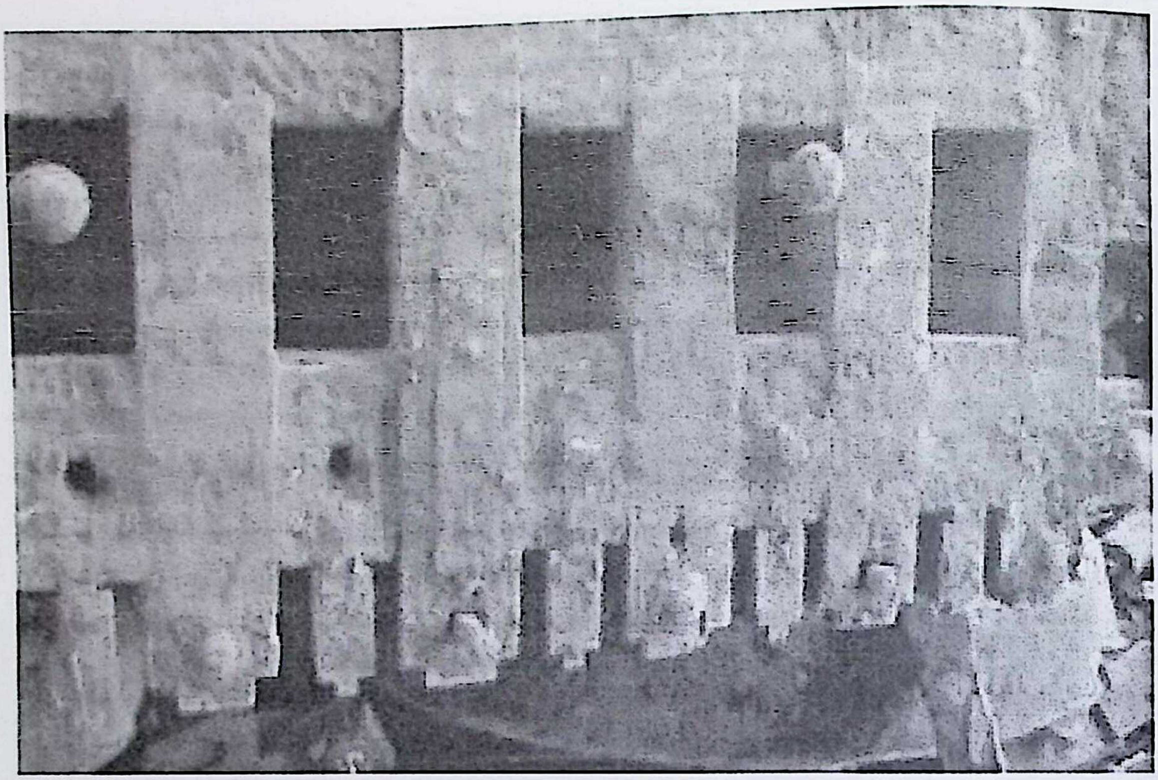
The structure just below the platform of the ratham



The structure just above the base of the ratham

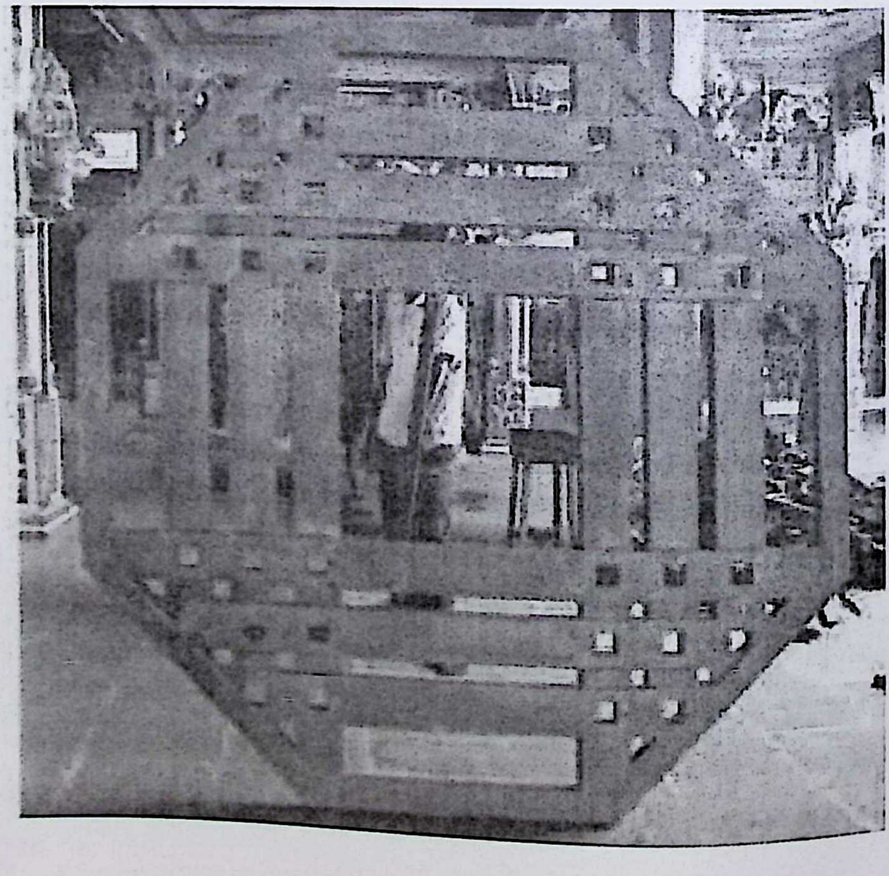


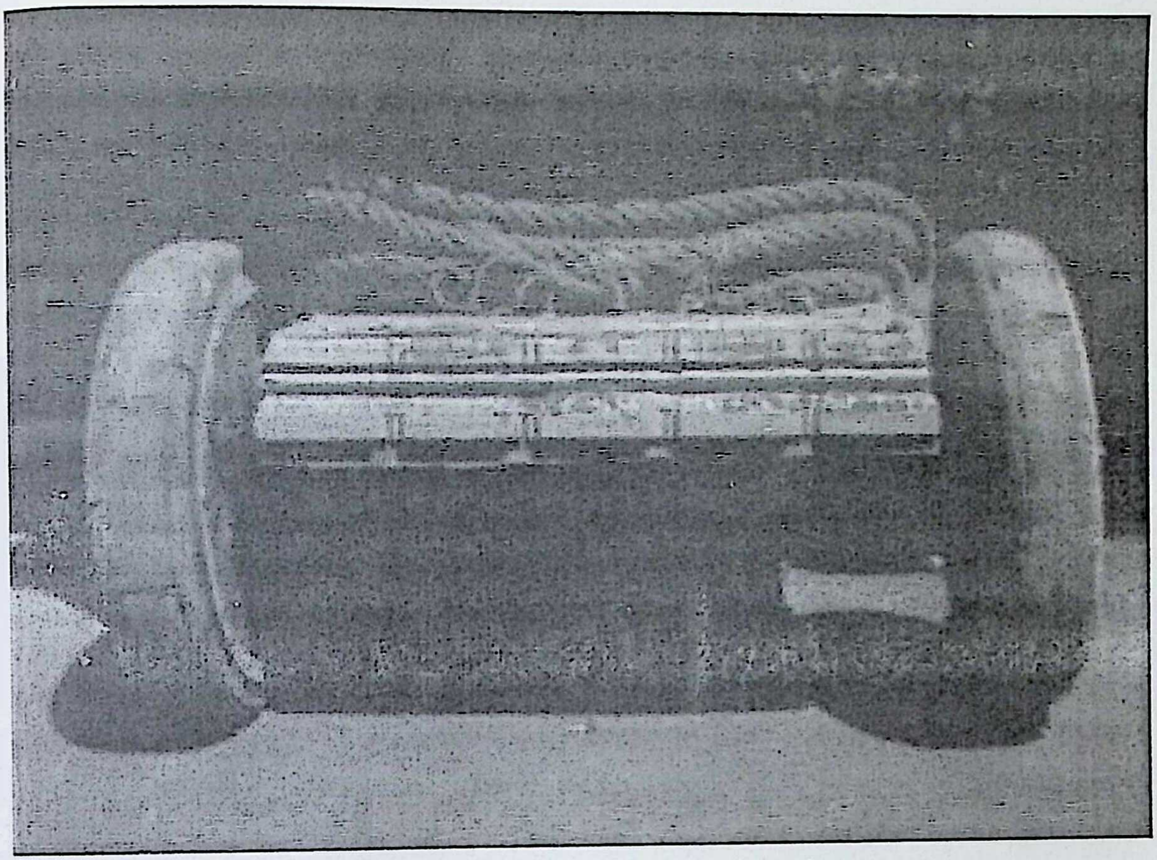
The structure just below the platform of the ratham *The single oneness of its multiplied beat*



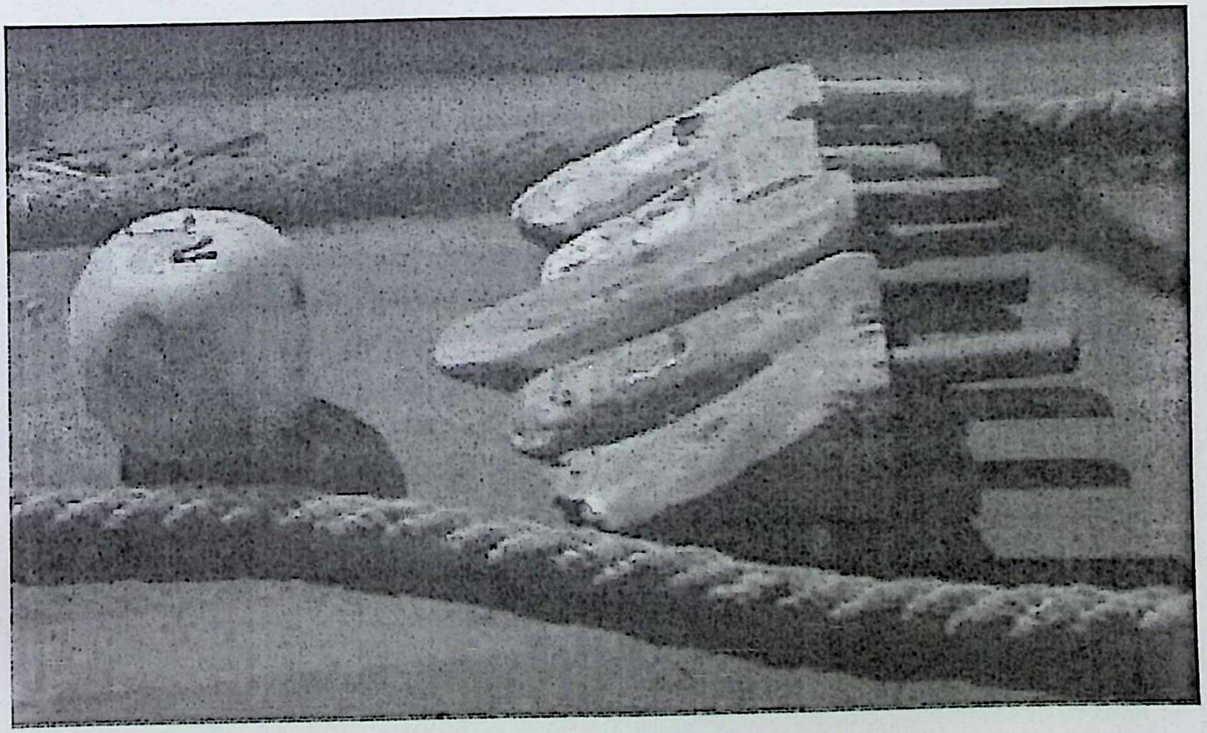
The arrangment of the wooden bars at various levels which give complete stability, strength and dristribution of weight in a way so that there is dynamaic and static stability to the entire devaratham.

A power projected into cosmic space,



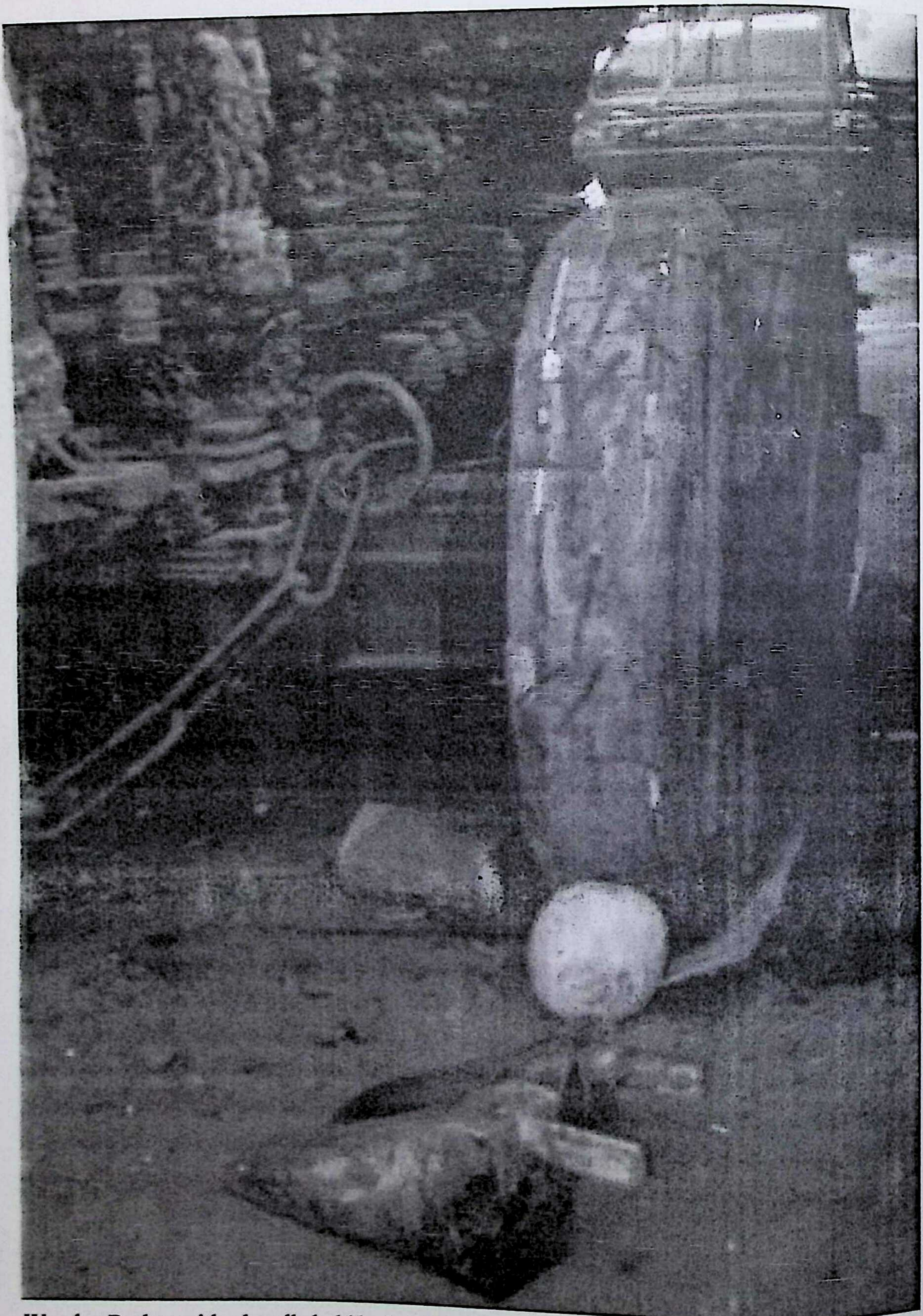


The vadham or the rope used for the ratham.



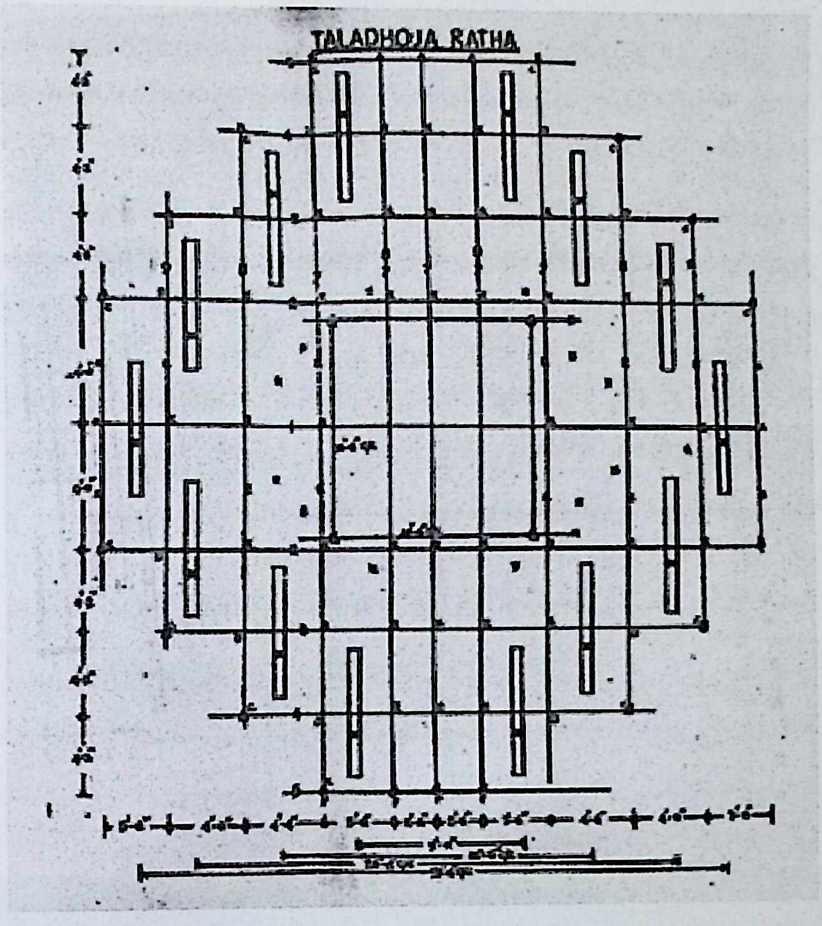
A white grurd is always kept under the front wheel to ward off evil.

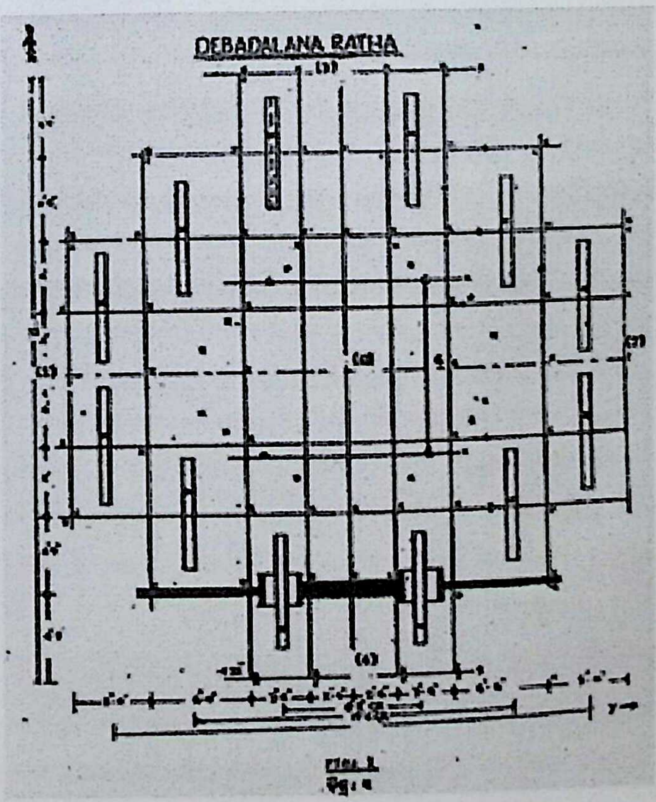
All walk by Nature bound for ever the same



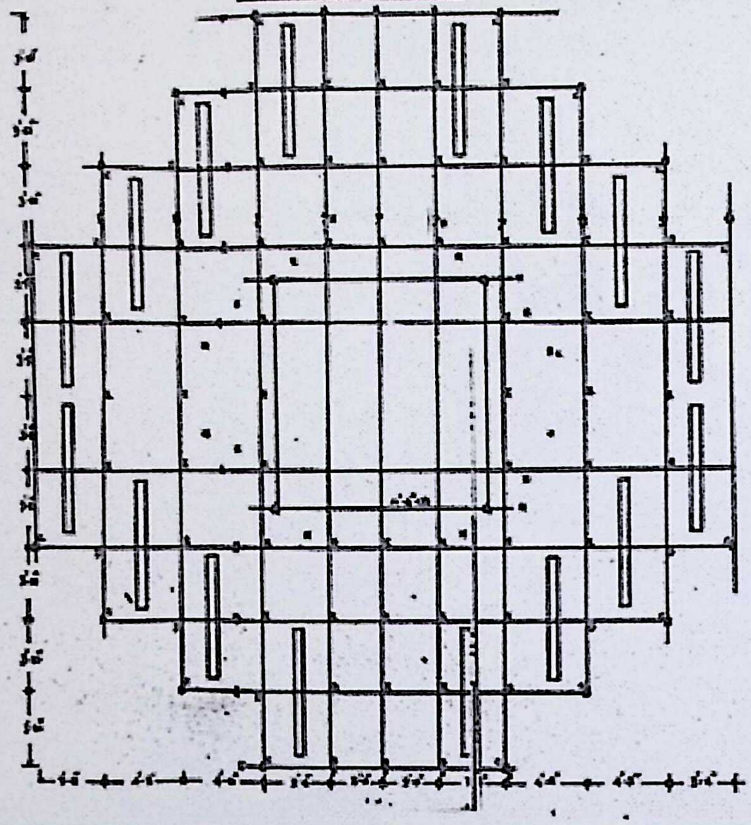
Wooden Brakes with a handle held by hands and applied reapteadly to control the speed of the ratham during the procession. Iron chain is used here to pull the ratham.

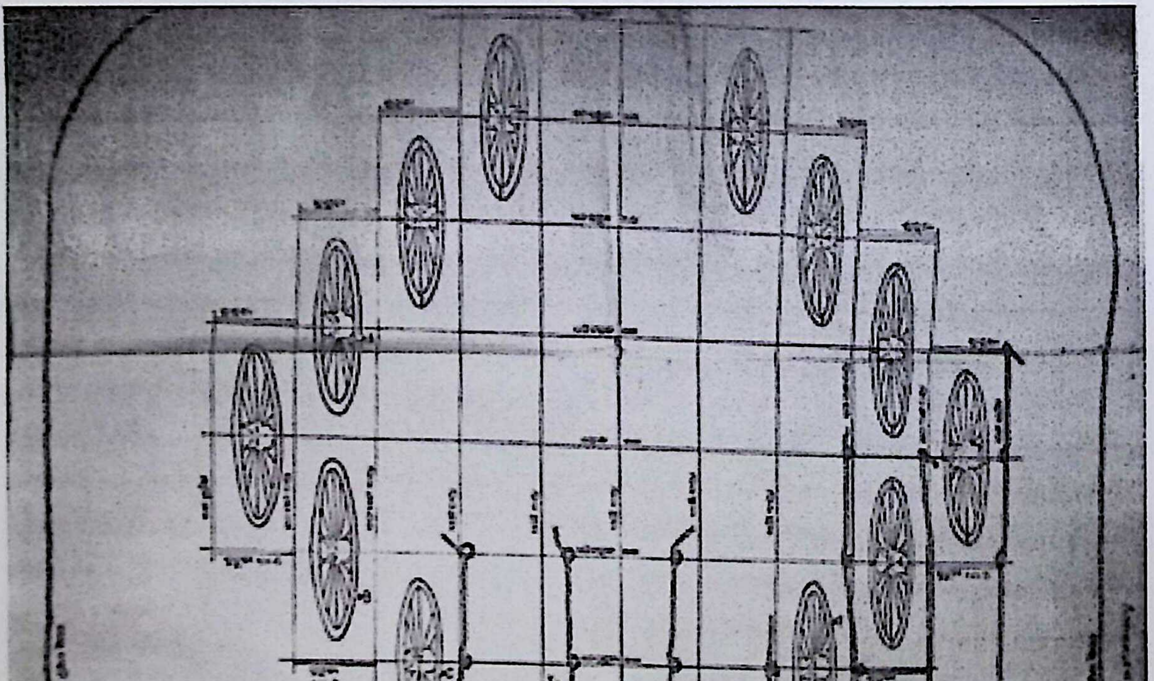
Yet were its works nor small and vain nor null;

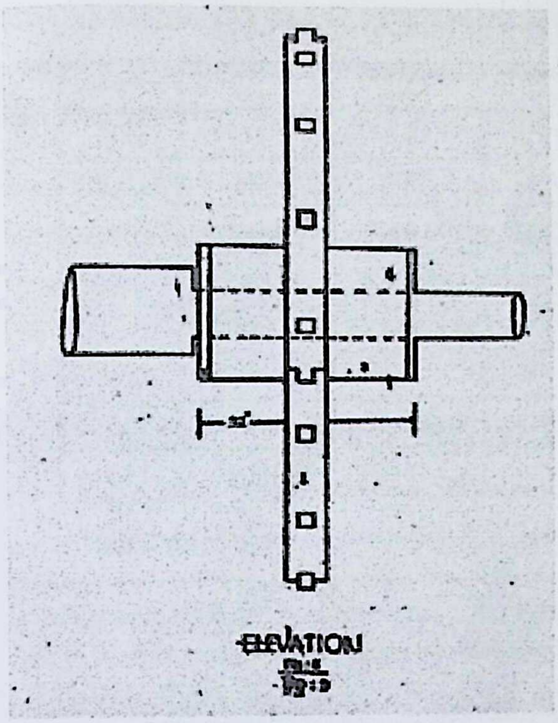

TALADHOJA RATHA

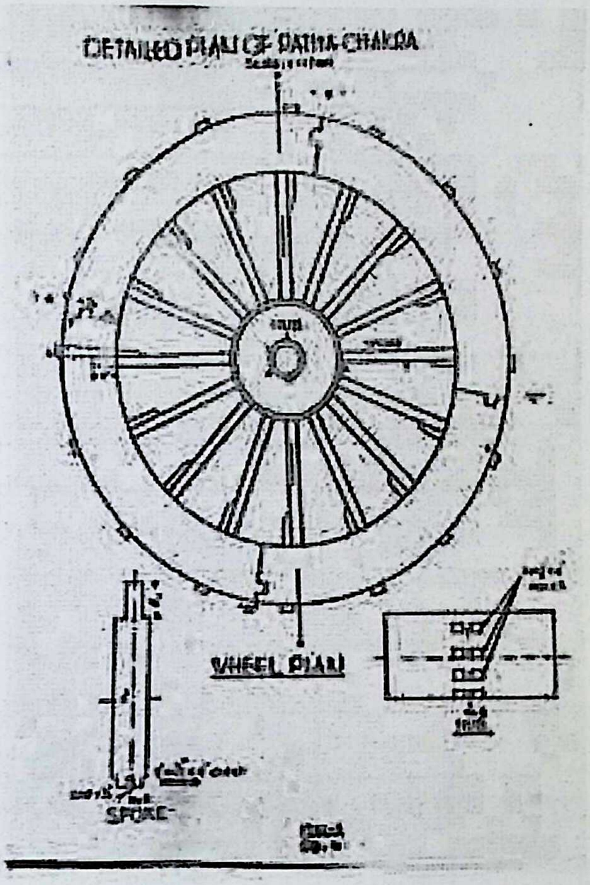

DEBADALANA RATHA
(3)
(1)
(2)
(4)

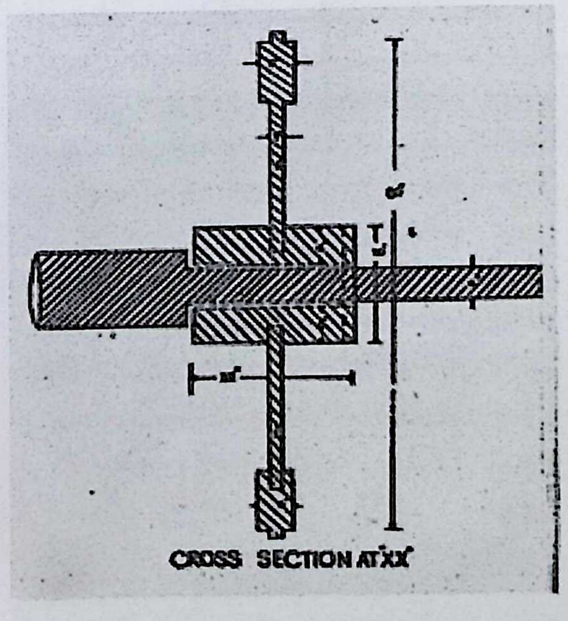
NANDIGHOSHA RATHA

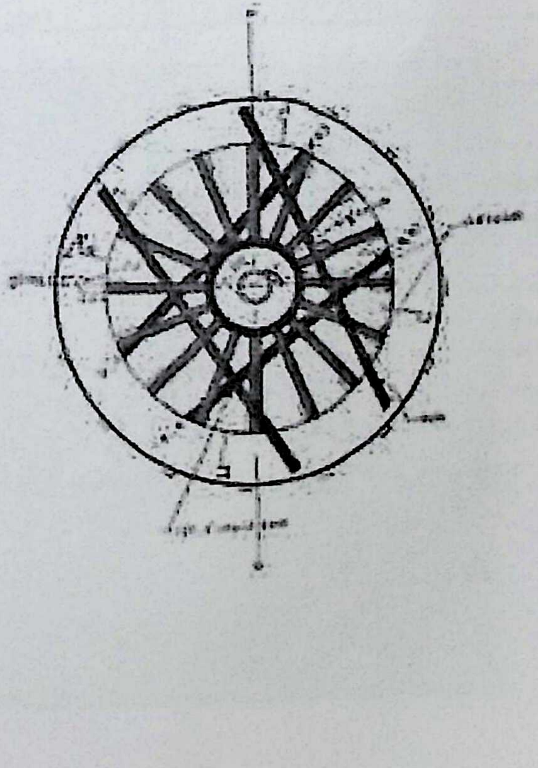





ELEVATION

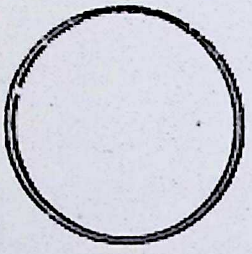

DETAILED PLAN OF RATHA CHAKRA
WHEEL PLAN
SPOKE


CROSS SECTION AT XX'

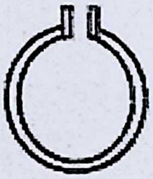


DESCRIPTION OF WHEEL PARTS

Sl. No.	PART	No. & SIZE	Devadalana Ratha	Nandighosha Ratha	Taladhoja Ratha	REMARKS
1	RIM	4 Nos. PER WHEEL	(C5) 7" X 10"	7" X 9"	7" X 9.6"	[illegible]
2	SPOKE	16 Nos. PER WHEEL	(C5) 7" X 2"	7" X 2"	7" X 2"	LENGTH VARIOUS MEMBERS
3	HUB	2 Nos. PER AXLE	DIA 20" L32"	22" X 32"	20" X 2"	
4	BEARING	2Nos. PER WHEEL	7.0 X 2" X .25"	7.0 X 2" X 0.25"	7.0 X 2" X 0.25"	MADE OF IRON OR STEEL
5	HOOP IRON	2 Nos. PER WHEEL	20" 0 X .25" X 2"	20" 0 X 0.25" X 2"	20.0" X 0.25" X 2"	
6	WEDGE	15 Nos. / WHEEL				
7	WHEEL		12 Nos.	16 Nos.	14 Nos.	
8	DIA OF WHEEL		80"	70"	75"	



No. 5
HOOP IRON



No. 4
BEALRING

NOTE : *Measurement are taken as primitive and crude scale. So it may vary slightly from year to year and as per availability.*

Fig. 9

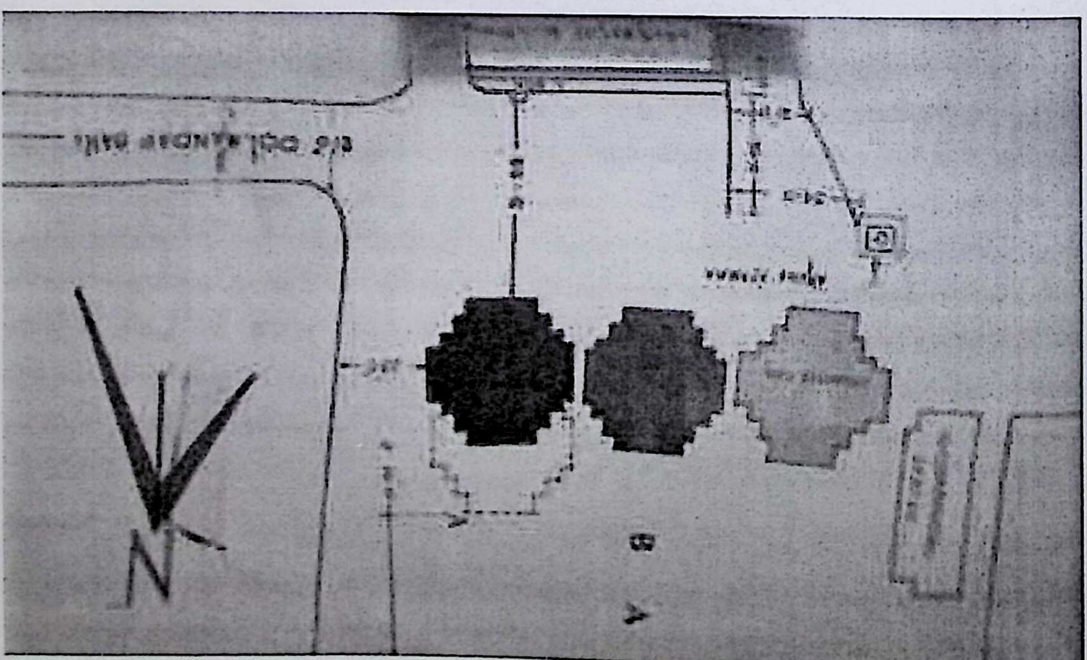
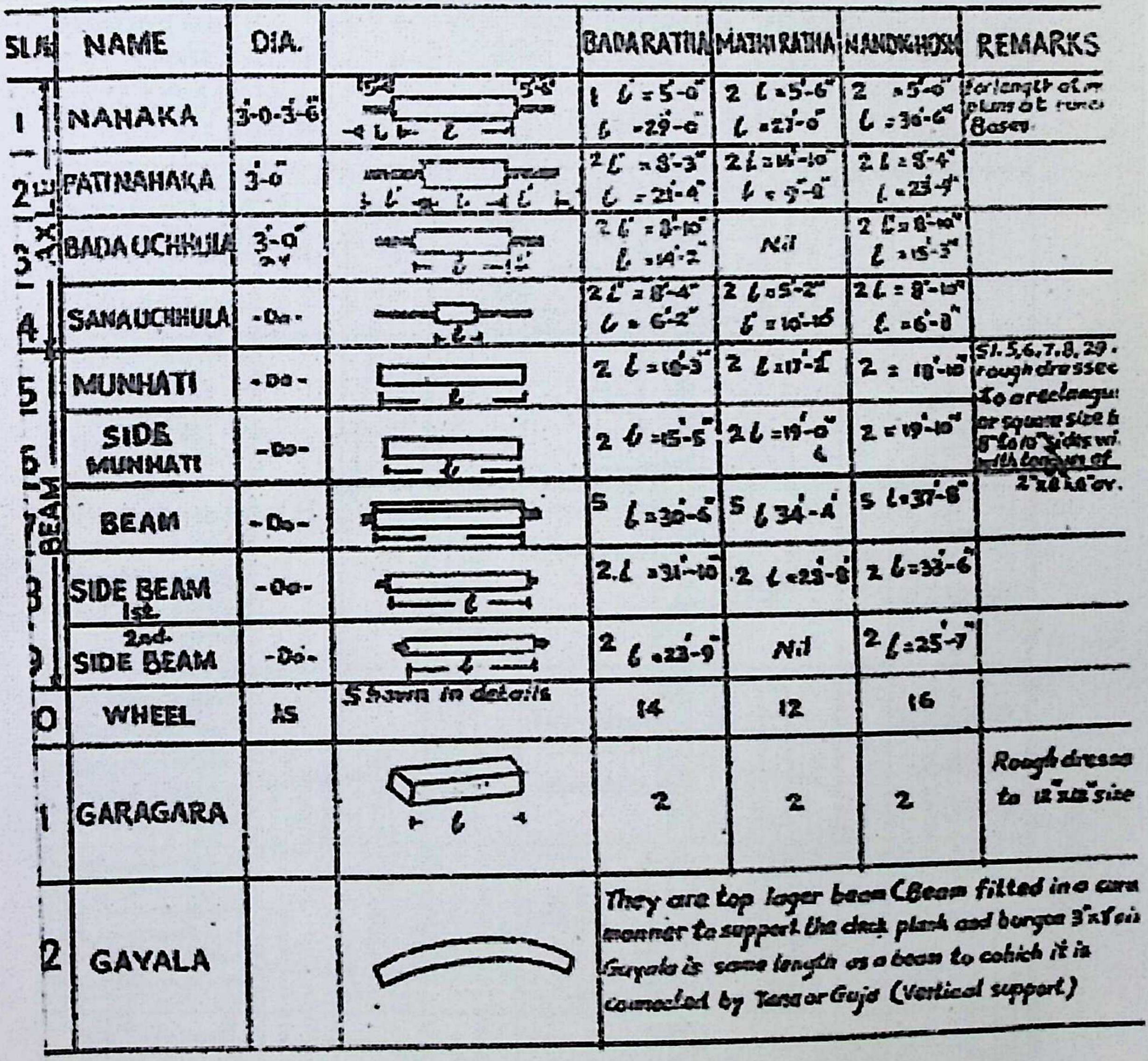


CHART No.1

DIFFERENT MEMBERS OF WHEEL BASE

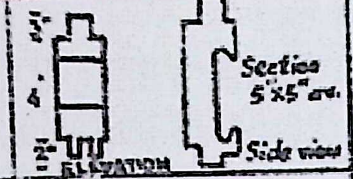
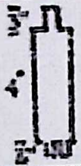
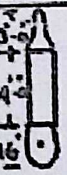
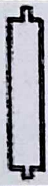
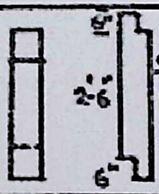
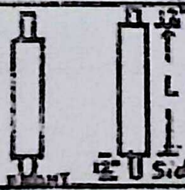
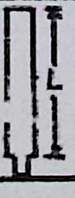
(REF DIAGRAM OF WHEEL BASES) HORIZONTAL MEMBERS.



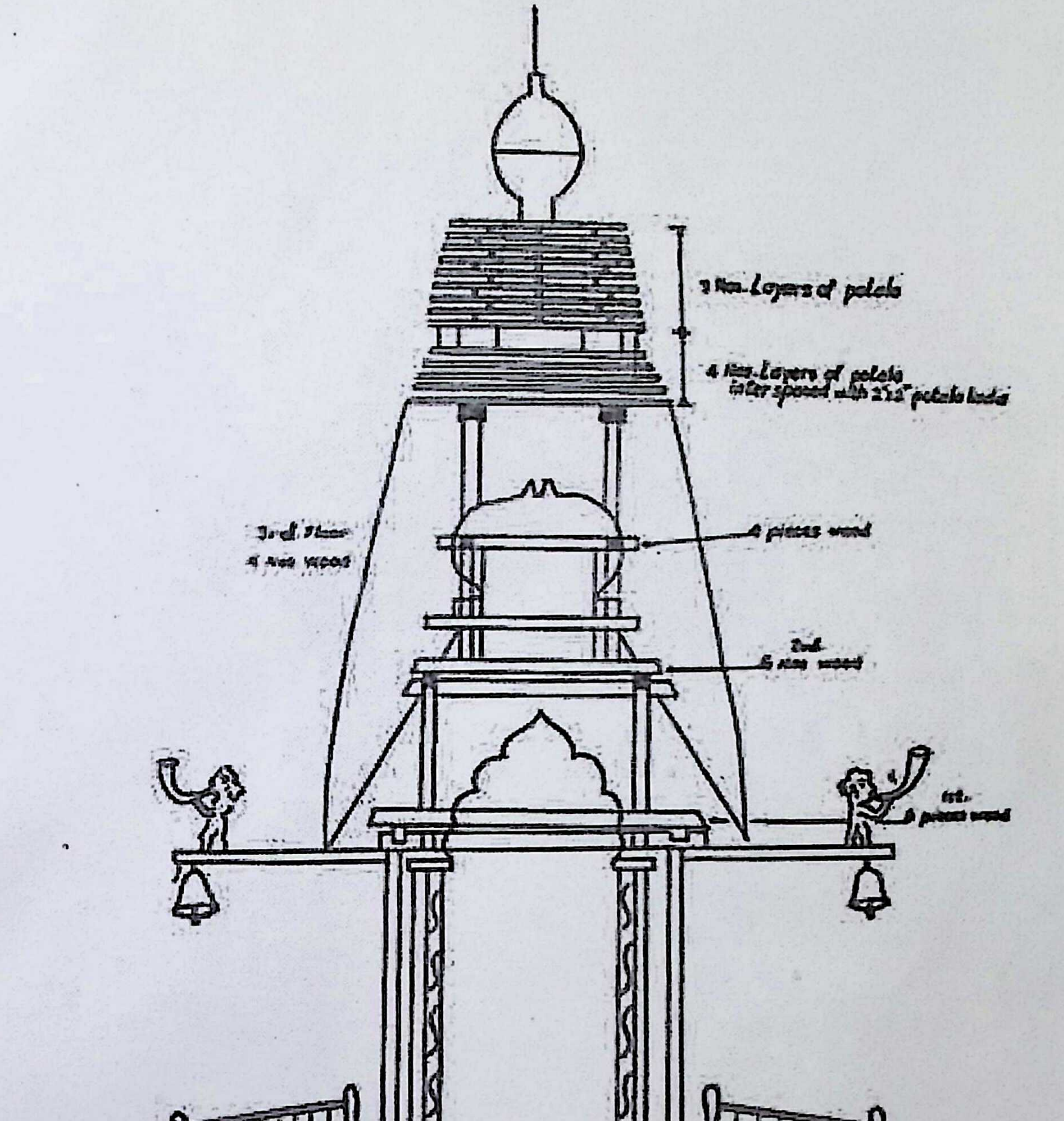
	SL.No	NAME	DIA.		BADA RATHA	MATHI RATHA	NANDIGHOSA	REMARKS
AXLE	1	NAHAKA	3'-0-3'-6"		1 l' =5'-0" l =29'-0"	2 l =5'-6" l =23'-0"	2 =5'-0" l =30'-6"	For length of m plans at [illegible] Bases
	2	PATINAHAKA	3'-0"		2 l' =8'-3" l =21'-4"	2 l =16'-10" l = 5'-8"	2 l =8'-4" l =23'-4"	
	3	BADA UCHHULA	3'-0" 2-4		2 l' =3'-10" l =14'-2"	Nil	2 l' =8'-10" l =15'-3"	
	4	SANAUCHHULA	-Do-		2 l' =8'-4" l = 6'-2"	2 l =5'-2" l' =10'-10"	2 l = 8'-10" l =6'-8"	
BEAM	5	MUNHATI	-Do-		2 l =16'-3"	2 l =17'-1"	2 = 18'-10"	Sl. 5,6,7,8, 29. rough dressed to a rectangu[illegible] or square size 8" to 10" sides with length of 2"x8 l l"av.
	6	SIDE MUNHATI	-Do-		2 l =15'-5"	2 l =19'-0"	2 = 19'-10"	
	7	BEAM	-Do-		5 l =30'-6"	5 l 34'-4"	5 l =37'-8"	
	8	SIDE BEAM 1st.	-Do-		2.l =31'-10"	2 l =23'-8"	2 l =33'-6"	
	9	2nd. SIDE BEAM	-Do-		2 l =23'-9"	Nil	2 l =25'-7"	
	10	WHEEL	AS	Shown in details	14	12	16	
	11	GARAGARA			2	2	2	Rough dressed to 12"x12" size
	12	GAYALA			They are top layer beam (Beam fitted in a cro[illegible] manner to support the deck plank and bargee 3"x8" si[illegible] Gayala is same length as a beam to which it is connected by Tana or Gaja (Vertical support)			

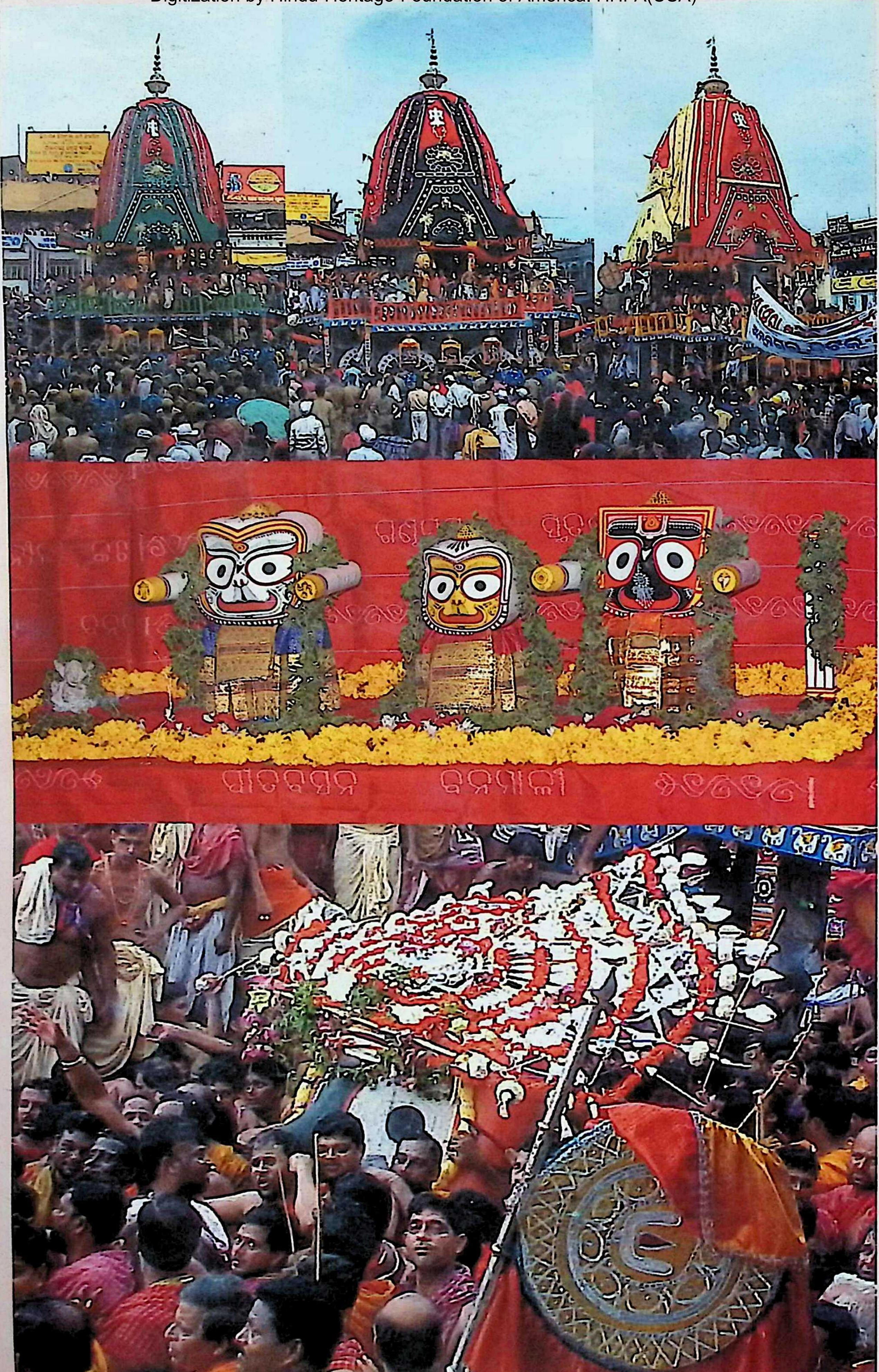
CHART No.2

DIFFERENT VERTICAL MEMBERS OF WHEEL BASE (CHASIS)(REF DIAGRAMS)

NAME	SYMBOL	SHAPE AND FORMATION	BADARATH	MAJHIRATH	NANDIGHOSH	REMARKS
Side Idols Guja and JALAJENTRA	● A	 3" 4' 2" ELEVATION Section 5"x5" ave. Side view	)	9	9	Idols are fixed on these Gujas There are grooves are engraved on this. c.g 5"x6" squares
TIKHAGUJA AND SALAGUJA	● B	 Section 5"x5" Roughly	8 + 11/19	4 + 11/15	8 + 11/19	Cross Section of Guja 5"x5" or 6"x6" (as per availability)
JOKA	● C	 Section 5"x5"	16	12	16	Additional Guja Its bottom is nailed to beam top 3' rises above to support the wooden Parapet fitted on the deck.
ASUARI	ǀ D	 5'-6" high	12	8	12	A vertical support at corners with some design painted.
TANA UTARAGUJA	X E	5' 6' High  Section 3"x3" or 4"x4"	48	28	48	Vertical supports (from wheel Base to deck bottom) i.e joining Beam and Gayala.
CHARPARICHHA GUNTHIA	= F	 Section 6"x6" or 5"x5" Side view	5	5	5	Addl. support to front gaja to support charparichha (support of horses bearing beams)
CHARINAHAKA	● G	 6" dia post Side view	4 L=15'-6"	4 L=15'-5"	4 L=15'-10"	Fitted to Garagara at bottom and Chhakatha at the top. these are main vertical members of Superstructure.
CHAUDA NAHAKA	● H	6"-5" dia post 	14 L differs but more than 15'	14 L differs but more than 15'	14 L differs but more than 15'	These are fitted to splitted Talagandi at the base and supports the Patala on it top.

The length differs as per the thickness of Talagandi on which it is fitted. They are to maintained the charinahaka top level.


3 Nos. Layers of palala
4 Nos. Layers of palala inter spaced with 2"x2" palala kada
3rd. Floor 4 Nos wood
4 pieces wood
2nd. 5 Nos wood
1st. 8 pieces wood

The vertical cross section of the devaratham at Puri, odisha. with the wheel arrangment as seen from the front, central supporting stracture, platform at the centre, the circular conical vimana with the copula and the wooden rounded stick for the dwaja and the kalsha.